

Recurring Nightmares

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Sequel to Bad Neighbors. Shikamaru has accidentally bound himself to Jashin, and everything just keeps getting more and more troublesome. AU with HidaShika, KakuHida, Kisaita and more.-Warning; Yaoi!

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A drag of a day

Recurring Nightmares

He woke with a start, gasping and reaching out into the sheer darkness. A clue, a clue was what he wanted, and he voiced this aloud, or he tried until a smooth voice spoke first, sleep still thickly pervading the sultry sound.

"What's wrong Shika?"

He knew that voice, didn't he? It sounded so familiar, it tugged at the edges of his memory, begging for entrance into his awareness. Who was that? God, he had heard it so many times before, he could recall the memories but couldn't place a name or attach a face to it.

Shifting to his left, a swish of blankets, creaking of mattress springs.

"Shikamaru. I'm talking to you! Don't ignore me!"

Who was it? Damn damn damn, he couldn't remember, it was important, this person was important to him and his heart pounded at the sound of their voice, miles ahead of his brain.

"Shikamaru!"

His heart suddenly clenched as he reached out to touch them. He could feel nothing, but there had to be someone there, someone who he cared about, someone who made him happy. /Who was it?/ Where were they? Why couldn't he feel them? They couldn't have left already, if only he could see. If he could see then he would know. He needed to know, something in his chest was hurting so terribly right now and he needed to find out why.

Lights flooded the room and he gasped at the burning in his eyes, throwing his arms over his face to protect them. He tried to kick off the blankets to get up from the bed and shut them back off, and

suddenly he realized he was standing. Why was he standing, he had just been laying in bed, but there was nothing now. There was nothing at all, he was just in an empty room...

He lets his arms down slowly, adjusting to the brightness of the room as best he could. Still squinting, he made out the figure in front of him. A man, a gorgeous man with a shiny chocolate waterfall of hair and beautiful exotic blue-grey pupiless eyes.

Neji!

That's who it was? Oh God it was wonderful sweet Neji, how could he ever forget him. He wanted to run forward and hold him, he wasn't sure why, he just wanted to go forward and grab onto him and never let go. But he couldn't move, he was rooted to the ground. He willed his body to move forward and greet his lover, but he couldn't respond. What's going on, why couldn't he control his body?

"You're back." He heard his own voice say. Why did he say that? Neji hadn't gone anywhere, he was turning on the lights. He had woken from a nightmare and Neji was concerned, it happened all the time since... since...

Neji smiled, but it was not a Neji smile. I was a cruel smile, a twisted sadistic smile that Shikamaru knew somehow in his gut was a forewarning for pain and suffering, and since when did his lover have fangs?

"Since what, my love?"

He can hear my thoughts. "Who are you?" His own voice asked again. *Neji doesn't call me by pet names. Nothing but Shikamaru and Shika.*

"Don't be mean to me Shikamaru. I came back to you, be happy." A false pout, and back to that smile.

YOU NEVER LEFT! Why do you keep saying that? Why do I keep saying that? "You are not Neji Hyuga." WHAT'S GOING ON!?

The smile lessened, into a grin, an amused grin. He knew that smile, no one could smile like that except... except who? He couldn't remember? He knew it it was on the tip of his tongue. Someone else important, or at least someone who had a big impact on him. Someone who had forced themselves into his memory, the memory that was failing him. Dammit why couldn't he remember?

"Do you still love me?" The not-Neji suddenly asked.

Why would he ask that, of course he still loved Neji, why would he stop? He tried to say something, to ask what he meant, but he couldn't. He wasn't saying anything like before, there was just quiet, and something wet on his face. He brought up a hand to touch his cheek, and the body actually listened, it came away wet. Was he crying? He didn't feel like he was crying... He was not sad, he was just confused. Where did Neji go? Who was this impersonator? What was going on here?

"Why did you leave?" His own voice asked, still looking at the wet mark on his finger, squinting through suddenly cloudy eyes. Why was he crying? He was happy, he was so happy to see Neji... Why was he so happy to see him?

Neji did not leave. This is not Neji. He corrected himself, but his voice would not acknowledge him.

"I fixed everything! Why did you leave me?" His voice said again, cracking from the emotion he still did not know why he was exerting.

The not-Neji smiled that dark smile again. "You cannot escape Jashin's will... it shall be done."

What?

"That's right fucker. I'm not through with you yet, I'll get you and your little bitch too."

Neji hair suddenly started falling out, strand by strand at first and then in clumps and then in waves. He stepped forward, laughing, as his body swelled taller and thicker and leaner. He closes his eyes and he's only inches away, and when he opens them it's not Neji at all.

Shikamaru tries to take a step back, This is not Neji. He knew that before but now even the voice and body with minds of their own seemed to believe it now. But he could not move, his body would not let him.

It's Hidan. It's that psycho that lived next door, and he's grinning that stupid grin and Shikamaru watches as his own arms stretch out to push him away. But they just go through him, like a ghost. And all at once Shikamaru screams and for once his voice does the same. Everything comes flooding back to him so fast that all he can do is scream. Everything that happened those few years ago, and everything that's happened since then. He knows where he is, he knows what he's doing, and he knows what's going on.

It's a nightmare, another stupid fucking nightmare and whether he gets himself to wake up or stays here he's going to be miserable. Because Neji *is* gone. He remembers now, he will just wake up alone in his stupid crappy apartment miles away from anyone or anything he knows or cares about.

Think happy thoughts. Funny thoughts. Change the dream yourself. He says, knowing neither his body or his voice will help now.

"Won't work pineapple head. You're mine now."

Puppies wearing sunglasses. Dancing flowers. Clowns throwing pies!

"That shitty generic stuff won't fucking help. You're fucked, just give in and experience the glory of Jashin." Hidan raises his hands above his head and that terrible triple-bladed scythe vapors into existence.

Somehing funny! Break it, break it now or you'll wake up! He doesn't want to wake up, not now that he knows what's going on. He doesn't want to lose control, he has control of his dreams, he just has to seize it.

Hidan made a face, hesitating, and he had the sense that he was going to win this. He'd beaten the Jashinist once and he could do it again. He just needed to change the setting, he needed to will the image of Hidan away and bring up something happy, something funny. Something that will make him laugh.

"Cowboy Neji." His voice said aloud. And he went with it, *Neji in boots. Neji in a ten-gallon hat. Neji on a horse even though he hates them. Neji with a peice of straw sticking out. Neji in plaid. "Howdy Shikamaru."*

Hidan laughed outright and grinned at him. That stupid amused grin that he'd told himself he would never see again. Why was he seeing it, it was so clear, Hidan was right there, he could reach out and touch him. Only he couldn't, because he'd tried that.

"Good one. But I'm still coming, so wake the fuck up."

Hidan was dead, he was tucked away safely in a tomb under the ground, there's no way anyone would go to all the trouble of getting him out. He wasn't real, he couldn't inflict pain, he had no control. This was shikamaru's dream, he could control it, he had to control it.

But the scythe came down nonetheless.

Nightmares. Every night, every damn time he closed his eyes.

He didn't even know why. He had been fine for those first 10 months after they'd moved across the country away from that stupid little town and the Akatsuki and that stupid fucking psycho next door.

He all but blocked it from his mind. He went on living contently, working at the new firm, surrounded by new people and new experiences. It was exciting, if anything. Neji had seemed to embrace it too, though Shikamaru had to admit, he never really was the same. Not that he blamed him at all, oh no, he did what he could to support him in everything he chose to do, he gave him space when he requested it, and smothered him when he would accept it.

If anything Shikamaru had been paying closer attention to the brunette more than ever before, and he was damn sure trying as hard as he could. What he was trying for, he had no idea. To make Neji better? To rekindle the relationship? To gain forgiveness for his terrible past blunders?

He didn't know for sure but he knew he would continue putting everything he had into it. Things weren't right and he had to make them right. *He had to fix it.*

It didn't make a difference in the end though... maybe aside from prolonging the inevitable. He could admit that somewhere in the very, very back, deep dark recesses of his mind, he knew it would happen. But it didn't stop it from killing him.

He left. He left without saying anything. He wrote Shikamaru a note and left it on the fridge, a fucking NOTE! No goodbye, no warning, he was just gone. Every single one of his possessions gone, like he'd never been there in the first place.

And Shikamaru had broken, snapped like a twig in the wind. Not violently, He did not lose his mind, he didn't go on a rampage. He didn't go after him, or cry, or scream. In fact for the first few days he just went to the bedroom and slept. He did nothing but sleep, except for the occasional bathroom break.

I'm so sorry Shikamaru, the note read. I really don't know what to tell you, I know you're going to hate me. But I can't take it anymore. Something died in me that day, I don't feel like myself anymore, and when I'm around you all I can do is remember how I felt about you when... when I thought I was going to die. I tried so hard Shika, to go back to normal. But I can't. When I see you... I see him. I can't change it, and I can't take it.

Shikamaru had all but completely shut down at this point. The letter went on to justify his leaving without saying goodbye as ' *Not wanting you to trick me into staying. Because this was something that had to be done .* ' There was no mention of where he was going, no mention of how he was funding this, which only lead Shikamaru to assume he'd been saving up secretly, just waiting until he had enough money... And that just tore another hole in his heart.

Neji had been lying and pretending this whole time. And what hurt him even more than that was the fact that it was all because he had to look at Shikamaru every day. That the person he loved most in the world could not bear to look at him, be touched by him, be around him, without unwillingly having those terrible memories forced back into his mind.

He wasn't even mad. He couldn't be mad at Neji, no matter how he tried. It wasn't Neji's fault, really. Out of that whole situation, Neji was the only one who'd been hurt. Neji was the only one who'd received the trauma. Shikamaru had caused it all, he had fixed it yes, but he had still caused it. Neji's trust was broken that day, and it was a permanent break. No matter how normal they tried to make their lives, the reminder was always right there in front of him...

No, he couldn't be mad. He couldn't hate Neji.

But the nightmares, those were becoming troublesome. He could accept reality.. when he was awake. He could fight off his depression when he knew what was going on. He could accept the repercussions of what had happened. But when he slept he should at least have that small comfort of not being miserable. He couldn't

even have that much anymore with these things going on. And they didn't even make sense, or maybe they did in some really difficult to see way. If he turned his head and squinted maybe he could sort of see a message, but that was the best it was, possibleys and maybes.

Hidans recent apparence had him absolutly baffled, however. That man hadn't crossed his mind for almost a year and a half, and now all the sudden he was having vivid dreams about him. Shikamaru wasn't stupid enough to think it didn't mean something, but he just didn't care enough to... well, to care.

He didn't know how he felt anymore, he was just numb, in a way. Sometimes it was a peaceful kind of numbness, other times it was a suffocating kind of numb that made him want to tear his hair out just to feel something.

Losing it? No, Shikamaru Nara was still very in control of himself. He was fully aware of what was happening around him, he could function just like any average person, and no one seemed to suspect at all that he was just a shell of a person.

It didn't matter though, he knew that after enough time had passed, it would get easier. He also knew that keeping himself cooped up inside all day while he wasn't at work wasn't helping him move on in the least. But damn, he just couldn't get himself to want to do anything. He supposed it was a blessing that he hadn't inadvertently become an alchoholic, or addicted to drugs. And how the hell he hadn't jumped back on the Mary Jay bandwagon was far beyond his comprehension.

He quite literally felt like doing Nothing. Absolutley nothing.

Unfortunatly for him... he was down to his last cigarette. That meant that at the very least he needed to make a trip to the convenience store.

Sitting in his easy chair as he so often did, the spikey-haired man sighed. It wasn't a hassle, really. He was actually just really tired, these damn night terrors along with massive amount of easy but annoying cases that keep flooding his desk have done a number on him. But.. that's what happens in the city. Of course he'd moved to the city, though in retrospect it didn't seem to make any sense. Why subject himself to even worse things happening on a daily basis? But It was very clear at the time, he didn't want to be reminded.

He rolled his head against the back of the recliner to look at the kitchenette. It would probably be a good idea to pick up some food too.

Ugh... food. It had lost it's luster long ago, Neji seemed to take that with him too, though not intentionally. Or maybe he did, it was anyone's call. But Shikamaru's sorry excuses for meals had all but ruined his appetite. He pretty well survived on microwavable meals now.

Damn... he was a hot mess.

Taking a deep breath, he hauled himself from the chair, stretching until he felt his spine pop. "Adventure awaits..." he muttered, making sure his wallet was in his pocket. "No reason to sit here and sulk anyway..."

The convenience store wasn't too far away. There was never a convenience store too far away. He didn't know if it was with this city in particular or if they were all like that but there was a place to buy booze, cigarettes, drugs, anything you wanted, all within walking distance. They weren't all technically 'Convenience stores', but he referred to them as that regardless.

Besides, he could go for a soda anyway. A little caffeine wouldn't hurt. It gave him some pep, and he could *a/ways* use pep.

"Two boxes of Marlboro reds. 100's."

"Is that it for ya?" The woman croaked from behind the register as she tossed the packs onto the counter.

"Yes, thanks."

The woman grunted in reply, manners were hard to come by here. Everyone was in their own little world. She clicked a few buttons on the register much slower than Shikamaru liked, and told him his total. After handing over the money he stuffed the two small boxes in his pockets, grabbed his soda and left, surprisingly in no hurry at all.

Being an easy-going guy in a big places like this, well, it's not a good combination. But Shikamaru could fend for himself. He'd been working on his Jutsu and improving himself ever since moving here. The one thing he had not purposely blocked from his thoughts was the utterly helpless feeling he had while watching Itachi, Sasuke, and Hidan fight. He couldn't help but think that his victory against Deidara had been intended. Either that or the guy was a super-noob among the gang. Maybe they'd been testing him too...

He shook his head and took a sip of the cold beverage, swishing it around in his mouth briefly before swallowing. Why was he thinking about this now? He had so much else to occupy his mind, so many more interesting things.

Like... Like his job.. Well not really. He pretty much plowed right through any case that landed on his desk. Anyone who couldn't figure it out was brain-dead, in his opinion.

But he still had.. What? Fuck, he had nothing. He had his apartment, which in reality wasn't bad at all, but compared to the house he and Neji had bought together.. Well, there was no comparison. It sucked. It was tiny and cramped and had only the bare necessities. It was all he needed, but still...

He had nothing else. Literally. He had no hobbies, he had no friends. He honestly didn't even know anyone from work, he couldn't even

tell someone his boss's name should they ever ask. He just didn't care enough to have any of those things.

Maybe that was the problem. Maybe he'd let his depression get out of hand, just a bit. But on the other hand, it was a pretty big transition. In small towns, it's easy to remember everyone's face, it's easy to place a name, there's only so many people there after all. But here, no one gave a damn who you were, no one said hello. Hell, people didn't even look up from their phones when you passed by.

"Son of a bitch." He sighed upon seeing his car. His front passenger tire was gone, *again*. Apparently there was some OCD tire thief that lived within the neighborhood. *That* was something to think about.

Well... not really.

But it was ridiculous that this person could afford to buy their own tires, yet they could still keep buying cinderblocks to oh-so-politely rest the car on after they stole yours. And whoever it was must be buff as fuck to carry around a cinderblock, a tire iron, and a car jack.

Shikamaru stared at it boredly, sipping on his beverage. Getting angry about such things didn't do anything but waste energy. He made a mental note to set up some kind of booby-trap. This was the fourth time this has happened within three months. His insurance wasn't going to keep paying for stolen front passenger-side tires.

"Awe man, is that your car? That sucks man."

Shikamaru turned to the new voice. A filthy looking man with a beard down to his belly-button was standing beside him. How had he snuck up on him like that? Shika didn't reply, he just continued sipping his drink, staring at the stranger.

"Yeah man, I seen that guy snaking your tire, but I wasn't sure if it was real or if Uncle Cracker was kicking in. Know what I'm sayin'?" The man laughed and nudged Shikamaru with his elbow. Great, a

crack addicted hobo saw who stole his tire, he'd be a wonderful witness for the insurance forms.

"You saw him?" Shikamaru asked slowly, just to clarify. Hey, it was a lead. Don't judge.

"Oh yeah man! I mean this guy was just straight-up crazy looking! He had a.. like a big trenchcoat or something on, ya know? But he wasn't wearing a shirt underneath, and he was fucking ripped man! Like, there was no way some little peabody like me is gonna try to stop him, ya know?"

"Yeah." Shikamaru said blandly. "I totally know. What else did you see?"

"Oh I dunno. I pretty much stopped paying attention after that man. I mean, I turned and walked away before we met eyes and the crazy fucker attacked me. He was swearing like a motherfucker though, ya know? Like shit, I almost wanted to ask him what he was on."

"Mm-hmm." Well, this conversation was useless now. But at least he knew he was looking for a crazy swearing buff guy wearing a trenchcoat with no shirt.

His eyes narrowed. No, no. There was no possible way. He pushed the thought from his mind, it wasn't possible. It simply wasn't possible. But still...

"Did he have silver hair by any chance?"

"Uhh.. I don't remember man. I think he was wearing a bandanna or something. I dunno."

"Ah, well, you are aware that I'm a cop, right?"

The man looked at him with such unrestrained horror that Shikamaru couldn't help but laugh. He reached out and patted the most-likely-

homeless man on the shoulder. "Just fucking with you. Have a nice night."

"Awe shit man. Shit, you really got me there for a minute!" The man called after him. "Hey man you're cool. We're cool. I like you. Hey is this where you live?"

Shikamaru shut the door of the apartment complex on him. He may be 'cool', and he might possibly need to make friends. But that man was *not* going to be one of them. If the Nara had any luck at all he'd wander off to some other part of town. He didn't like being mean to helpless people, but you had to when you lived in a place like this.

A/N- Merr. Wasn't really sure where a good stopping place was. So that'll do.

OHAIGUYS! Yep, I'm back. And guess what? i brought sequel-ey goodness with me. And guess what else? It's gonna be another multi-chapter!?

Why? Because I'm fucking insane! :D

Yeah, but seriously, I have like no time to sit down and write anymore. Luckily for my I got this coolio app on my phone. So I can write on the go! But anyway, I originally meant to go back through Bad Neighbors and fix all the mistakes and all that crap I promised I was going to do, but I ended up just re-reading it. I'm actually pleasantly surprised at how it turned out. I was so unsure while writing it but.. I dunno. So, I was inspired to continue it. Hopefully this is a good thing right?

Kay, so, obviously, if you've read this far you've probably realized that this is a sequel. You really should have realized that when it said on the summary, but hey, I don't judge. I'm not going to summarize everything that happened in the prequel, because I'm lazy. If you haven't read it, go read it. Or you will probably be pretty confused.

But, aside from that, this one is going to be pretty different, if you haven't noticed. Being the person I am there's probably still going to be humor in there, but I'm not going to go out of my way to force it in there. It's probably going to be a lot more dark just for the fact that the main character has gone through some pretty emotional shit. He's just not the same person. He is, but he's not.

Uhm.. Well this Author's note is super long so I'm gonna stop here.

REVIEW MY LOVLIES! I want to hear what you have to say.

Unseen

Recurring Nightmares

The next morning held no surprises. It was a Saturday, conveniently, which meant he had absolutely nothing to do but think about trying to get out of the half-year long funk he'd been in. It would be so easy to spend the day doing what he normally did, take the 3 mile long drive to the outskirts of the town and find some area to practice new jutsu's and just fuck around in general. Some cloud gazing would be nice.

But unfortunately his car was missing a tire. So that was out of the question.

But how did one go about making friends? Just walk up and start a conversation and beg for further interaction? Yea that would work, and then make a trip to the hospital after getting tazed and beaten down. Sounded like a wonderful way to spend saturday.

Well, The first thing to do would be getting another tire. While it was true that it was faster to get around the crowded streets on foot, it was a dangerous idea. And when going long distances, well it was just unrealistic. If you were lucky enough to have your own car you damn well better use it.

So, forcing himself to get up and get something done, Shikamaru made his way outside. He didn't HAVE to be right in front of his car, but it usually helped. There were always identification numbers and tags and all other forms of information that his Insurance adjustor needed, and while memorizing them wouldn't be that hard for the Nara, he had never gotten around to it. It's just such a drag...

He took the stairs at a fast jog as opposed to taking the elevator. The apartment complex wasn't unkept at all, and the elevator was as good he just didn't like the things. Besides, being on the 8th floor of

the ten story building, it was a good way to sneak in exercise to a daily routine.

... It was sad that these were the only things he had to think about now...

Luckily for him, the bearded stranger wasn't to be found when he got outside, but this wasn't something he was grateful for until later. At the moment he was occupied with staring dumbly at his car. Or more specifically, the tire of his car.

The one that had been missing only the night before.

After standing there in the doorway for a few moments he remembered where he was and quickly took the few steps down onto the sidewalk after shutting the door. Then continued to stare.

This.. this didn't happen. It just didn't. When your stuff went missing around here, you never saw it again.

His first thought shot to the homeless man he'd chatted up, but there was no way he could have accomplished it. The only theory behind that would be that he was secretly a wealthy person in disguise, but no one was that kind.

It occurred to him maybe to check for I.D. numbers on the tire, but he didn't know what the number had been on the last one, or if tires even had numbering systems like that.

Shikamaru scanned the surroundings, turning in a full circle before returning his attention to the tire when he found no one else to be present. This was bizarre. Never in the other 3 times this had happened had another tire just spontaneously appeared the next morning. And quite frankly the situation was making him a bit paranoid, and that was always troublesome.

Was this a joke? Is someone screwing with him? He knew damn well that last night had most certainly happened. He still had the smokes

he bought.

The random thought that he hadn't picked up groceries flitted across his mind, but then again he hadn't had a car.

"Thanks to whoever you are..." He muttered, pulling out his cigarettes and lighting one. He still continued to stare, feeling as if he was being watched and unsure of what to do at this point. Not only about this current situation, but the rest of his day as well. Now he had more options, obviously, and he could go train if he wanted. But... he didn't know if he wanted too.

He shifted his weight to one leg and kicked at the tire, as it would answer his questions, and shrugged, exhaling smoke into the humid morning air.

Well, at the very least he could go train for an hour or so. It would at least clear his mind and give him the adrenaline to walk up to a stranger and spark a friendship.

So he stepped off the curb and began to make his way around to the drivers side, but stopped abruptly. Something had caught his eye, and quite frankly it made his skin crawl. He backed up but continued to stare straight ahead. He didn't know if he wanted to doublecheck to see if what he saw was real or not.

But he did anyway. He forced himself to turn his head and look, and it was there. He hadn't been seeing things. His stomach rolled and his cigarette fell to the ground and hissed out when it hit the damp concrete.

There, on the inside of the rim, in a place where he wouldn't have seen it had he not been looking from this precise angle. It was a circle with an upside down triangle.

And it was red. It was blood red.

Well, at least it was that color that blood turns after it's dry, which actually isn't really red. But this just confirmed that it was indeed red.

Shikamaru felt like he was going to be sick, he was going to be violently sick. His breaths came faster as he stared at the symbol, trying to will it away. Telling himself it was his imagination, that there was no way it was really there, that he had never woken up this morning and he was still dreaming and this was a nightmare. And to make sure of it he even brought his hand up and slapped himself, probably harder than necessary, without taking his eyes off the miniscule little symbol.

Oh God... It was still there. And now his face hurt. This was really happening, he was really seeing this. He suddenly realized he was on the verge of hyperventilating and closed his eyes, tearing himself away from the sight. He counted in his head and he took slow breaths.

It wasn't possible. There was no way, absolutely no way. Not unless... Unless it was another Jashinist. Yes, that could explain it, though it didn't make him feel any better. The cult must have found out what he did to Hidan. They.. they were either out for revenge, or perhaps they wanted him to join them still. Shikamaru had to rebalance himself as the ground suddenly swirled beneath him. Was he having a panic attack? Oh God was he having a nervous breakdown? He couldn't, that didn't happen to him, he was Shikamaru Nara. He was easy-going and he was broken and he didn't care enough about anything to have an episode like this.

But.. if that was true. If they were after him... Hidan had been a Holy priest or a High priest or whatever it was called. That meant he was at the top of the chain, which meant he was the most threat. If he had managed to take Hidan out then how would any of the underlings think they stood a chance against him?

While it's true that Itachi did most of the work back then, even though in all honesty all he'd really done was help him find the zealot and

knock him unconcious, and then *keep* him unconcious. But if they knew that then they obviously wouldn't be after *him*.

Then again he didn't know how many there were, The Uchiha himself had told him that Jashinism was more common than anyone realized.

Shikamaru, hands shaking, quickly pulled out another cigarette and lit it. There was no way in hell he was getting in that car, convenience be damned. But now he sure as hell needed a change of scenery. He'd just have to venture out around the neighborhood and see if there was an unoccupied stretch of open space that he could exert some physical frustration in. If anyone was watching him, they could see what he was capable of. He wasn't an unmodest person, but he would admit to anyone who asked that he had been working very, very hard to improve his jutsu and physical prowess. And he knew without a doubt he had taken some pretty big strides. The jutsu was coming along slowly, but surely. And his speed and stamina had very well skyrocketed. Though he'd never had to test it... He hadn't had any actual sparring matches against anyone since Neji had left. But regardless.. when they witnessed it they'd either turn and run, or get reinforcements. And if he had any luck on his side at all it would be the first.

Sweat poured from him as he tried to catch his breath. The shadow clone in front of him mirrored this, and he was vaguely aware of the shutter sound of cell cameras going off somewhere to his left. A few girls had been jogging through the park when they'd spotted him and nearly tripped over each other as they stopped to stare in awe.

It had made him chuckle, and admittedly boosted his ego a little bit. But unfortunately for them, girls weren't his thing. Only men. Men who looked like girls. Like Neji.

He shook his head, that was the last thing he needed to do. The session had pumped him up and he was feeling pretty good, he'd managed to shove the idea of a coven of Jashinist lurking in the

shadows, waiting for the right time to ambush him, to the back of his mind. And right now he needed to focus on breathing. Damn, smoking would be the death of him, but he was less willing than ever to quit with every day that passed.

He knew that Asuma had died in some sort of car crash about a month after the whole ordeal. And for now he was under the assumption that it had probably been Sasuke. He had never kidded himself with the idea that he would actually stay incarcerated. After all, he took on Itachi and Hidan at the same time, and did quite a bit of damage. And now that he thought about it, the youngest Uchiha could even be a suspect in this whole 'missing tire' situation. Maybe he'd come after Shikamaru for revenge. Which meant Neji was in danger too, wherever he was.. maybe he should try to contact him...

No. No Shikamaru, bad. Stop thinking about him. He sighed in irritation. He had to keep the Hyuga off his mind. His break was over, he needed to get up and get back to his practice.

The murmuring of his onlookers increased when he stood up, and he sent a glare their way, though it only made them blush and whisper among themselves. Ugh, what was it with girls and 'bad boys'?

Once again, Shikamaru was not conceited in the least, but he couldn't help but think sometimes, *if Neji could see me now...* His training session had tripled in every aspect after his lover had left, in an attempt to keep him off the Nara's mind. So he supposed he could call it a hobby.

Hooray, he had a hobby.

That made his existence just a little bit less pathetic.

Dammit Shikamaru! Stop being negative!

He shook his head and nodded to his clone, bouncing from one foot to the other as he readied himself. There was no one better to spar

against than yourself, right? At least, when you didn't *have* anyone else...

He blocked a high kick and dodged the low sweep that came after it, grabbing the clones arm as he spun and twisting it. The clone grunted and took a blow to the kidneys before dropping his legs out from under him and swinging them up to wrap around Shikamaru's neck. Shikamaru evaded it by letting go of the clone and falling into a backward somersault, extending his foot at the last second and catching the clone in the chin.

The girls cheered. Shikamaru growled.

He threw a few punches and leaped to the side to avoid a roundhouse, and was suddenly on the ground as the clone predicted this and pounced immediatly after. Shikamaru used his knee to shove the clone over his head and grabbed it's ankle, yanking it back and twisting to that it was forced to flip onto it's stomache. As he was doing so he used his free hand and put his index and middle finger to his lips and mouthed his invocation word. Immediatly the shadows of every blade of grass within a 30 foot diameter pooled around his feet and reached up to restrain the clone.

Then he felt a drain on his chakra, and his eyes met the clones. A glowing mass of black and purple energy was rotating in it's hand. Shikamaru barely managed to jump to the side in time to avoid it, and then the clone was back on it's feet and instantly 10 feet away.

Yea, he could finally do those huge leaps. Shikamaru pulled out a smoke bomb and threw it at the ground, then reappearing behind the clone only to have his jabs and kicks blocked. He didn't manage to evade as the clone's hand glowed purple and jabed a flat palm into his chest, and suddenly he was on the ground.

"Dammit." He growled, flipping himself back up onto his feet, narrowly avoiding having his face stomped in, and twisted his body into a jump-kick. The clone caught the brunt of it right in the face and

his body was thrown sideways so forcefully that its head hit the ground and it vanished in a puff of smoke.

Shikamaru stood there panting slightly for a moment before letting his hands fall to his sides. This wasn't working, even his shadow clones couldn't keep up, mainly because they kept draining his chakra by using his own jutsu's against him. He could just split his reserves in half and give it to the clone, but then they'd both be drained in minutes. Unfortunately for him, something he really couldn't improve on was the amount of chakra he could hold. It wasn't all that much, not any less than normal, but not any more either. He didn't even know if there was a way to learn to spindle it and store it in the body for later. Maybe there was, maybe it was just a psychological thing.. He made a mental note to look into that.

The troupe of girls collectively 'Aww'd' when he put his shirt back on and collected his things. He'd been out here for 3 hours, that was a pretty decent sized work-out. Unfortunately his idea of working himself up to go meet some people had been completely tossed away. Not only was he pretty well pooped, he still had this troublesome Jashinist and/or Sasuke revenge scheme stuck in his head.

Immediately he pulled out a cigarette, lit it, and inhaled deeply. He held the breathe with an expression of contentment, and released it.

He'd passed some sort of old-school looking diner on his way here, and he could go for a little taste of home-cooked meal. Honestly, this wasn't such a bad day. Maybe he'd just blown the Jashinist symbol thing a little out of proportion. Then again, it wasn't a coincidence. Someone purposely stole his tire and returned it with that blood circle specifically to get his attention. Whoever it was, they had it. Whether they were going to act on it or not was up to them now. He would go grab a bite to eat, restore a little energy and chakra, and find something else to do. Maybe take a swab of that blood and see who it belonged to. Maybe scan a few obituaries and make a few calls. Of course it wouldn't be anyone he knew, because he didn't know anyone, but a lead was a lead.

He stepped up onto the sidewalk and was just taking another drag of his cigarette when a quick movement caught his eye in the foliage some 50 feet from where he'd been training. But when he focused on it, there was nothing.

He grimaced, great, he was being watched. Shikamaru wasn't stupid enough to rationalize it as being an animal. This was a city, there was no animal big enough to make a movement like that, except maybe a deer. And they wouldn't venture this far without either getting hit by a car or called in and picked up by animal control. And the stalker was either really bad at stalking, or wanted him to see.

Or *think* he saw.

You did see it. He reassured himself. This was no time to let doubt kick in. Something important was actually going on, and he needed to pay attention. No more walking around like a zombie. Neji had ripped out his heart, but that was something he'd have to deal with. His life was *not* over, and he needed to stop acting like it was.

Shikamaru opens his eyes, and he's in a kitchen. Not just any kitchen, it's his kitchen, his *old* kitchen. The kitchen he and Neji had shared.

He sighed and buried his face in his hands, leaning on the island.

He just couldn't get that damn man off his mind. Not in reality, not in a dream.

Yes, he knew this was a dream. This was one of those lucky ones when he was aware of it right at the beginning. So he should be happy, in a way, this way he could control it, he could force Neji out of it...

If he had any idea what else to change it to.

"Shikamaru."

"Not now.." He replied drearily. There was no telling what would happen if he just walked out the door. It might just take him into his old front yard, or he could fall into some completely different dreamscape. That is... if there was a door. Apparently this version of his house didn't come with doors... or windows.

That's okay though, all he had to do was will a door into existence. Use his brilliant mind to create a door, he could picture it oh so clearly in his dream-mind, but it still wasn't appearing. He sighed, and looked around. Apparently this dream wasn't going to follow orders.

"Shikamaru."

"Go away." He groaned. *It's not real*, he told himself, *don't be tricked by your own subconscious mind*.

"Listen to me dammit!"

"What!?" He barked at the disembodied voice, "What the hell is it? What do you want? How do you want to torture me tonight huh?"

There was no reply, and he laughed, slightly shocked at the slightly insane sound of it. "Yeah, okay. That's so like you. Yell at me to listen to you when I'm busy and then get mad and fucking walk away when I start paying attention."

Silence.

"HEY!" He shouted, his voice echoing in a way he never remembered it doing. Maybe it was just one of those details he forgot. "C'mon. Hurry it the hell up! I'd like to actually feel like I got some sleep in the morning when I was up. So get the stupid nightmare half of this over with and give me control of my fucking dream back."

"Shikamaru?"

He jumped and whirled around, and choked back a pained cry when he found Neji behind him. His hair was wet, like he'd just gotten out of the shower, his beautiful eyes and perfect brows creased in concern. He wasn't wearing a shirt, only silk pajama pants.

"Who are you yelling at?"

"No one.." He replied, smiling softly despite himself. He reached out, he just wanted to touch him, just for a moment, smooth his hair back from his face. He could do it, he just had to want it badly enough, this was *his* dream, he was in control. *He was in control.*

Neji looked at him quizically as he did, his gaze flicking back and forth from Shikamaru's outstretched hand to his face.

"Are you okay?"

He could do it. He could touch him, he wanted it. He wanted it so desperatley that there was no way it wouldn't happen. He took a step forward and brushed his fingertips against his cheek.

They ghosted through, like they always do. Every damn time. In every dream, in every nightmare. He can't touch him, not ever. Not for a moment, not for a millisecond.

He recoiled against the almost tangible pain that exploded in his chest. Letting his clenched fist fall to his side, and dropping his eyes to the floor. "This isn't fair." He said, his voice breaking and his eyes stinging, like they always do. Every last Goddamn time.

"Why can't you leave me alone?" He said, looking back up at Neji, and gasping. Neij had changed suddenly, and he was standing in front of him all covered in bandages and gause, his arm in a sling and his hair 5 inches shorter, cut in a long bob. It was exactly how he looked that day in the hospital, except his eyes weren't covered.

He almost wished they were.

Because they weren't there at all. Just empty sockets, empty *bleeding* sockets.

"I don't want to leave you alone." The broken Neji said, but not in Neji's voice. It was demonic, both high and low at the same time, like there were three people talking in unison. *"How do you think I felt, Shikamaru? How do you think I felt laying in that bed, unable to see the man who was going to try to murder me standing there over me, staring at me?"*

"Stop it." Shikamaru said through clenched teeth.

"How do you think I felt being down in that dark, dirty hole. Feeling pain from wounds that didn't exist?" It's voice was getting louder. And Shikamaru closed his eyes. This wasn't Neji, this wasn't Neji speaking, This was a nightmare. It was nothing but a nightmare. It wasn't real, nothing was real.

"How do you think I felt Shikamaru? HUH?! HOW DO YOU THINK I FELT!? Every time I took a shower I see that scar. Every time I look at you, I see you standing there defending him. Saying he's 'a real person'. Smoking weed with him. Having a grand old time with your buddy while he's sitting there looking at me thinking of how good it's gonna feel when he KILLS ME!"

"Shut up!" Shikamaru snarled. "It's not my fault!"

There blood leaking out of Neji's mouth as he talks now, Blood spurting from his sockets, that Jashin symbol is suddenly on his chest, bleeding more than it ever had in reality.

"You think you're a shell of a person? I DIED, Shikamaru. There was nothing left of me. Twice, you left me alone, you let me be attacked. Twice, I thought I was going to die. Twice, I accepted that fate. And you know what they say Shika, third times a charm. I've got one life left."

"I didn't know.." Shikamaru was sobbing now. It wasn't real, he knew it wasn't real. But everything the not-Neji was saying. It was true. Neji had gone through the worst trauma anyone could go through, the only thing missing was rape. "I'm so sorry Neji. I tried so hard. You wanted me to finish it. I he's gone Neji, he's dead! I fixed it, please.. please come back.."

"I've got one life left. And I'm not wasting it on you."

The last was nothing more than an echo as the world went dark around him. Shikamaru tried to regain control of himself. It's not real... It had become his mantra. It's not real, it's not real, it'snotrealit'snotreal!

That didn't stop it from hurting though. It hurt so bad. If it wasn't real, he shouldn't feel the pain.

"I can take it away..."

Shikamaru looked up, he knew that voice, but it was a shock to hear it have actual emotion in it.

"You're dead. Go away." Shikamaru said flatly, he didn't even beleive himself with that tone. "That's enough of a nightmare. I've been tortured enough. Leave me alone."

"I don't want to torture you. I'm giving you a way out."

"No Hidan, go away."

"God dammit Pineapple head I'm trying to fucking help here."

"SHUT UP!" Shikamaru shouted, finally looking up and meeting the violet eyes of his ex-neighbor. "You're the one who started it all! This is all your fault! Neji was right all a long. I wish you would have just fucking left us alone, I wish you would have never moved in, I wish I never met you you stupid fucking PSYCHO!"

Hidan glared at him, And it was all Shikamaru could do not to shrink away from his gaze. If looks could kill, if his dream decided that looks could kill, he would be dead right now.

"Don't piss me off pineapple head. You *know* what happens when you piss me off."

"Yeah yeah. You'll kill me or sacrifice me or whatever. You're dead. Shut up and leave me alone."

"You're mine fucker. You just wait."

Shikamaru gasped into awareness, sitting up on his bed and clenching the sheets. They were soaked with sweat, and he had to wipe his eyes, as usual. He looked around the room, this was his apartment. Which meant this was real. He never dreamt of his apartment.

After catching his breath, he threw off the blankets and stood up. He needed to make a call, these nightmares were getting to be too much. He could probably handle Neji's hateful words, but when Hidan made an appearance, that was too much. It made him jumpy and paranoid, and now especially since this morning's little discovery, it was even worse.

He needed to call the lab at his firm. That was one of the few perks of being in a city now, the firm had it's very own forensics lab taking up the entire basement floor. Granted, it wasn't top-of-the-line stuff going on down there, but it was far better than having to send it off and wait three weeks for results like they'd had to do back in the crap little town he used to live in.

Regardless, he needed to see who's blood that was, and then he needed to look up the person to see if it was anything relevant. He needed to put an end to this crap, it was getting far, faaar too troublesome.

A/N- Whew. That was... that was emotional. Almost made myself cry, heh.

Anyways, Don't hate Neji. He went through some pretty serious shit, and that doesn't just go away. This was absolutely inevitable for the sequel. It would be ridiculously unrealistic if he was just all the sudden okay. I know it's heart-wrenching. But don't worry. I have a plan. :)

Anywhosen, REVIEWWW because you love me. If you don't, I guess I have no choice but to eat your soul.

Ghosts of the past

Recurring Nightmares

A/N- Warning. This chapter gets a little bit.. morbid, toward the end. So uh... yeah. Beware.

"The tests are inconclusive, Mister Nara. "

"What the hell do you mean 'inconclusive'?"

"We were not able to find a match."

"You're saying that like it's a common occurrence."

"My apologies sir, it really is a bit strange, but not impossible. It could belong to an illegal immigrant, possibly. But we have determined that it's most certainly not from an animal."

"So It's human, you just don't know whose."

"Correct."

"Hmm. Well keep me updated on any further information. You have my personal number in the lab. Contact me immediately with any leads."

There was silence on the other end, then a crackling, like the woman on the other end was switching the phone to her other ear.

"Mister Nara. My people are swamped already with much more pertinent cases. Quite frankly, blood tests aren't too difficult or time consuming but delving any deeper into a wild goose chase like this is impossible at this point."

Shikamaru was the silent one now.

"We quite simply don't have the time or resources at the moment to be taking personal requests. Perhaps fill out the forms and see if you can turn it into a homicide case, otherwise you will have to do your own research, sir."

The woman was not rude or condescending in any way, and though Shikamaru was irritated at this news, it wasn't her fault. There was a person dying somewhere in this city on a daily basis from a vast number of causes. Not every one of them was reported, but a majority of them were. And most of them were murders. That was what his division of the firm handled, homicides.

"Alright, thanks for your help." He told her, and hung up. It wasn't rude really, well it was, but the lab techs were hung up on all the time. Everyone was always in a hurry around here. Too much to be done, too little time. That sort of thing.

He thought maybe of going in to look through the stack of files undoubtedly on his desk. He didn't have a photographic memory, but he would probably recognize anyone he'd interacted with recently.

Yes, he had the feeling the blood belonged to someone that had been around him. It was either that or it was one of the Jashinists' themselves. As far as Sasuke fit into this, his blood would be in the system, they ran off government files, as did all forensics labs, and Sasuke had bounced around from foster home to foster home his whole childhood while his only living blood relative was serving his time in prison for killing his family. So he undoubtedly had a large record.

And besides, Sasuke was not a prime suspect. Shikamaru just didn't have the gut feeling that he was involved at all. He had been wrong before, but not for a few years.

But, going to work on a Sunday was always a drag. He was lucky enough to get a normal, constant schedule working in the profession he did. At his old firm he worked whenever they needed him, however long they needed him. He was also one of the higher-ups

and there weren't even an eighth as many people employed there as there are here in the city. And partnered with that is the almost non-existent promise that it wouldn't do him any good. He had just about a gazillion other co-workers that did the same thing he did, and whoever it was may have landed on their desk. Or hell, for all he knew the owner of the blood wasn't even a victim of homicide or any other crime!

All of this bundled together literally just made even having the thought not worth the effort. He was at a dead end here.

He paced his livingroom. Sundays were the worst for him. Even though he wasn't hardly lazy at all anymore, he still had that self-imposed label stuck in his head. He didn't like doing unnecessary work, it still rung true. But everything he busied himself with these days was pretty well just that, it needed done.

Right now though... There was nothing. He couldn't think of anything to do, and normally that wouldn't bother him. But the current situation had him concerned. He didn't want more trouble, he had his own inner battles to fight, he didn't need the past coming back to haunt him as well.

So, he suddenly came to a decision. If the lab wasn't going to help, and his stalker wasn't going to reveal themselves, then there was two choices. He could sit and wait for them to make a move, which may rip control of the situation from him, or he needed to come up with a plan.

And to be blunt, he was pretty fucking tired of doing nothing.

"This is going to suck so hard..." He mumbled to himself, tossing the pocketknife from hand to hand. Damn, he really didn't want to do this, but he honestly didn't see any other way to draw them out. The symbol made it clear that whoever it was is a worshipper of Jashin. And he knew from personal experience that the demon god was

pretty much the only thing they care about. There would be no other way to lure them out.

He sighed and looked around, he was back at the park now, though he'd waited until evening so there would be less people. He didn't want anyone except his stalker to see him.

He'd gone back to the clearing where he had done his workout the previous day, and made the small trek across the open grassy stretch of land to the edge of all the foliage where he'd caught a glimpse of the stalker hiding before. It really was nothing more than a border, but the tiny forested area was big enough for him to hide himself in.

There were a few evening joggers running along the sidewalk path far back where he had come in, but other than that he could sense no one else. All he felt was that paranoia that someone was watching him. He briefly wondered if Neji had been feeling this way those last few months he was here. But he pushed the thought from his head. He had to focus.

He let his gaze fall to the grass, he really wasn't even exactly sure how to go about this, and he was quite honestly on the verge of throwing up. He most certainly believed in Jashin, Hidan's power had to have come from somewhere... And this belief was what made him hesitate.

The Nara didn't want some Demon's attention, just the person whose been messing with him. Now that he actually understood someone was tailing him, a lot of strange things he'd noticed but shrugged off previously made sense. Whoever it was, they hadn't made a move quite so bold as the symbol on his tire, though honestly he hadn't paid much attention. Noticing that miniature circle had really just been dumb luck..

Great, now he didn't even wanna go home.

"Okay." He said to jar himself from his thoughts. "Just do it. Let's get it over with."

He could swear he heard a twig snap somewhere far to his left. He noted this but didn't react. Again, they were either really dumb, or wanted him to know they were here.

He put the blade to his palm, biting his bottom lip when it dug into his skin. He watched as he dragged it diagonally. No, that wouldn't work, it had to be deeper. He needed a circle big enough to sit inside, and this cut wouldn't bleed enough.

/This is so insane... / He took a few deep breaths and touched the blade back to the wound, looking up and grimacing as he pressed harder and dug it once more. He held back the whimpers that threatened to escape, reminding himself that he was being observed. Shikamaru wasn't a pansy, but he wasn't a damn masochist either. And despite what everyone seemed to think, the palm was a painful spot. You have more nerves in your hands than anywhere else on the body, except maybe for genitals. Though the skin is also thicker here to help protect those nerves, it makes it hurt a hell of a lot more when the skin actually gets broken. And doing it yourself isn't as easy as a certain albino psycho had made it look.

He hissed as he removed the blade and looked down, cupping his hand so as not to waste any blood that was quickly pooling there. Damn, that might be a bit /too/ deep. Good thing he brought some first aid supplies, seeing this exact circumstance as a probability.

He crouched down, holding his blood-filled hand just above the ground. His 'this is a bad idea' bells were going off in his head, he had no idea what he could be getting himself into. There were so many millions of different variables that could lead to trillions of scenarios gone horribly wrong.

But, it didn't matter. He had nothing left to protect except his peace of mind. He had to get it back. He couldn't be Shikamaru Nara without it. And besides, omnipotent being didn't just appear and force

you into following them just because you did something stupid. Free will would always reign, in any circumstance.

At least... he hoped so.

He twisted his wrist slightly and let the blood trickle onto the grass, he didn't know if it just had to be in a general circle or if it had to be an unbromen connection. He supposed he would find out though. He started turning ever so slowly in a circle, having to keep flexing and massaging to keep it flowing. Really, he didn't want to cause himself permanent damage but this was such a slow process. Though the way Neji had described how Hidan did his ritual, he had to inflict what would be life-threatening injuries on himself to get his blood flowing as fast as he did. And he wasn't going to do that. He just needed to be patient, something the zealot never was. He could do this, he could handle it. He was not a novie anymore, he had learned his lesson, he had not made such terrible mistakes since then. Not when facing them had caused him such pain.

He finally managed to finish a visible circle, and now he just had to make the triangle. He started this task immediately, after gingerly smoothing the knife over his cut to make sure it hadn't started scabbing until he was done.

While he absently massaged his hand and formed the triangle he wondered briefly what to do next. He sure as hell wasn't going to stab himself through the heart., as his 'reference' had done. He supposed he would just sit down and pretend to pray or meditate or whatever they did. And this, this may take awhile. There was no telling how his stalker would react, they could do any number of things. Show themselves, consider him no longer an enemy and leave, or just keep stalking.

He would have to continue being patient, if Hidan was any example for Jashinists then if he sat here long enough they would probably get pissed off and come out from their hiding spot and attack.

It seemed to drag on forever, finishing the stupid triangle, but finally he did, and immediatly he plopped down in the middle of it. This was exhausting, and took more blood than was healthy for a mortal like himself. He took a moment to catch his breath, and resisted the urge to pull out a cigarette. Then studied his circle. It certianly wasn't unbroken, but you could tell it was there. He barely made it big enough to sit in, and was irritated to realize that he was going to have blood stains on his pants and didn't consider this obvious problem when preparing.

Damn. No wonder girls were pissed off during PMS.

He supposed he could wrap his hand now, he'd accidentally wiped some blood on his jacket too. People were either gonna be afraid of him or call the cops when he made the walk home. He definitely needed a shoddy reputation with the local police force in this town. Yeah, that would make life easier. Not.

He took a slow deep breath and reached into his knapsack, (Yes, he wore those.) and pulled out the antiseptic and gauze. His breath hissed in loudly as he cleaned the deep wound, and the cleansing process seemed to increase the bloodflow and he stared at this for a minute considering something.

Quickly, he brought his hand to his mouth and licked a bit of the blood off and began wrapping it up, feeling a bit foolish. He wasn't going to do any sacrificing, but it's not as if it would hurt anything. At least he didn't think it would. He was pretty ignorant to anything Jashin related..

He was ripped from his thoughts by a sudden crack of thunder, so loud that he actually jumped. When the hell had it gotten cloudy?

He jumped again and whipped his head around as he heard what he could only explain as some sort of weird birdcall from his other side. And then again the thunder boomed.

An ominous wind picked up, not a strong one, more of a breeze, but it was so cold that it gave Shikamaru goosebumps.

He had a sinking feeling now. This... this wasn't because of him. It couldn't happen. Good God how many times was he going to have to tell himself that.

But damn, there was no way. There was just no possible way.

He felt a raindrop, so icy that he yelped when it slammed into his forehead despite himself. He shot to his feet then and jumped out of the circle, still trying to keep pressure on his wrapped hand. And just then he heard something that made his stomach drop to his ass and his heart rocket up his throat.

It was a laugh, a familiar laugh. It was the same obnoxious but mesmerizing sound he'd heard just recently in his dreams, as well as those couple years ago.

He turned his head slowly, feeling like his eyes were about to pop out of his head from how wide they were. He couldn't seem to inhale, and thought his heart had taken residence in his throat it was still about to beat right through his ribcage.

He finally met his stalkers eyes, and once more he wanted to haul off and slap himself. But he couldn't get his body to mind him.

This had to be another nightmare.

It HAD to be.

There he was, standing not 20 feet from him, grinning that damn grin, his eyes sparkling with glee and murderous intent at the same time.

Back from the dead.

It was Hidan.

The rain, as if attuned to the situation, began pouring down all at once. Soaking both men almost instantly and chilling Shimamaru to the core.

Or he thought it was, he didn't know if it was the rain doing that or his brain.

Within seconds his skin was numb and it felt as if he were in a sandstorm of glass shards. And the cut on his hands throbbed, having been abandoned by the warmth and pressure of the other.

He couldn't even process thoughts. All he could do was stare.

"Well don't you look fucking happy to see me." Hidan said. His voice wasn't the same as he remembered, as it had been in the dream. It was, but it wasn't.

Maybe it was the terror, the Nara had really never been so hopelessly horrified by Hidan's presence before. Back then he'd never been much of a threat. He was just the annoying insane neighbor.

"Th-thrilled." Shikamaru forced out, loathing his voice.

What was happening right now. Had he lost it? Did someone slip him some drugs?

Hidan just kept smiling, and it occurred to Shikamaru that he was wearing a black trenchcoat, it was open and exposed his bare chest except for the strap that ran diagonally across his torso. Probably holding that damned scythe on his back. But he most certainly wasn't wearing a bandanna. His silver hair was plastered to his skull more than usual from the rain.

It didn't even seem to be affecting him. And damn it all if he didn't still look as good as he used to. He hadn't changed at all but in some way he definitely had.

"You... Is it really you?" He croaked.

"Mmm pineapple head did you miss me so much?" Hidan's grin only grew, and it only lowered Shika's spirits more.

"It is rather hard to escape your own /tomb/. Luckily I had some help so I could come see you faster. How long have you been dreaming of me hmm?"

Shikamaru could not get his voice to work anymore. All that came out was a choking noise.

Hidan sneered. "You still think I'm stupid, don't you?"

He followed with insane, unbound laughter, raising his hands slightly and looking like the evil villian straight out of some cheesy movie.

"You think I'm the stupid one!" He gasped in between fits. "But you have no idea what you've done! You don't have the slightest fucking clue what's going on!"

Suddenly serious, he yanked the scythe from his back and pointed it at Shikamaru.

"You think you found a loophole, fuckwit? Think again, managing to sacrifice another Jashinist's soul is worth ten normal souls. You done fucked yourself, pineapple head."

Shikamaru choked again. What... what did he say? *Another Jashinist!?* No, nonono he was lieing. This... there was still no way this was real. It had to be a nightmare, but.. but he could feel the rain, his hand was on fire.

He heard himself groan and Hidan chuckled as he realized Shika was accepting it.

All he had done was make a circle and taste a little blood. That couldn't be the all that was needed. There had to be some horrible, fucked up requirement. Cutting off a goats head or eating live kittens, anything!

"Now you're mine, motherfucker." That look was in Hidan's eyes again, it was harder to tell because he wasn't absolutely furious like the last time Shikamaru'd seen it. But it was there. This was for real, Hidan was back, and he fully intended to kill Shikamaru.

But he wasn't going to do it right away. A thought Shikamaru was both thrilled and terrified about.

He couldn't get his feet to move until after the first blow, he stood like an idiot while Hidan, with what only seemed like one step was suddenly right in front of him, drawing back and landing one hell of an uppercut on him. Shikamaru felt himself lift off the ground briefly and in the millisecond it took for him to hit the ground he was back to his senses.

That one was for free. He wanted to say out loud, but didn't dare. He was much too frightened for his life to be arrogant right now.

He flipped back onto his feet and ripped the machete-like object from his knapsack. It was all he could find weapon-wise around his house, and honestly he didn't even know why the hell he had it. But his stomach sank when Hidan beamed at seeing it.

Thoughts flooded his head. Had Hidan planted this? Had he removed every other weapon and left this there? Why a machete? Was it rigged? Would it hold up?

Audibly growling, he shook all the doubts from his mind. There was no time for this. He was about to be put to the test, He suddenly wished he hadn't given Hidan the upper hand by seeing how well he'd improved, but there was nothing to do about it now. He still had a few tricks up his sleeves.

He lunged forward, swinging the blade as he channeled his chakra into it, making the silver blade turn black. Hidan evaded easily and Shikamaru just kept coming at him, he couldn't use that scythe as long as they were in such close proximity. All he had to do was wait for Hidan to slip up just a bit and he could get the upper hand.

"That's right! I wanna see you get pissed!" Hidan shrilled, spinning himself to throw a kick that Shikamaru blocked with his weapon-weilding arm, and then used his other to grab on to Hidan's ankle, that purple-black glow smothering his entire arm. Hidan's eyes widened only a little before Shikamaru heaved and the albino was flung across the tiny clearing and went rolling into the mud.

It was only another second before Hidan was back up again and rushing him with that same speed that had left the Nara speechless the first time he'd seen it.

But he could handle it now. He charged at him and did the same and they exchanged one blocked blow after the other with their weapons, hopping and leaping around in circle only to return to each other and attempt another strike. Shikamaru knew that all Hidan had to do was scratch him. In fact if Hidan wasn't such an idiot, (Yeah, he was still a moron.) He could have had it all over with and just gotten a bit of his blood off the ground.

But he seemed to want to prolong this battle, like he'd been waiting a long time for it to happen.

And damn this rain, it was getting in his eyes and making the terrain slippery, he had to use precious chakra to force into his feet so he wouldn't loose his footing.

He knocked the scythe away once more, grunting as he put all the strength he had into it, and it had the desired effect. There! Hidan was knocked slightly off balance, he had an opening to do some damage! A rotating disk of black and purple chakra formed in his hand and he slammed it into Hidan's ribcage. But at the same time, just before he collapsed, Hidan swung his leg under him and somehow managed to let himself fall briefly unconscious onto Shikamaru. The machete went right through Hidan's gut as he fell, but within one-thousandth of a millisecond he was awake and grabbed Shikamaru's throat, not even caring that he was impaled and that there was a humongus bruise already forming on his side.

Again shikamaru used his knee to push Hidan into a somersault over his head and he rolled to his feet and immediately charged again, managing only to rip a slash through the trenchcoat. Hidan swung that giant Scythe and Shikamaru leaped backward, putting his first two fingers to his lips and growling his invocation word. All the shadows shot first to circle around his original shadow before slithering off to circle around Hidan.

The albino was having none of it though. He dodged the shadows, not letting his pathetic one, thanks to the heavy cloud cover, be snagged in the jutsu. And when one of the tangible tentacles sprung up around his foot he those damn pikes came slipping out of his sleeve and he cut the thing in half without expression. As he landed he rocketed forward toward Shikamaru, who's shadows could not keep up, and he was forced to end the jutsu to focus on blocking that Scythe from cleaving his head in two.

Shikamaru had to admit that he was impressed with Hidan for being able to successfully maneuver the scythe around with one hand and still use that stake in the other. This was getting to be troublesome. Their speed was pretty well even, while Shikamaru's agility seemed to just barely be better than Hidan's, it was proving to be a moot point. Anything Shikamaru managed to do went unregistered by the masochist.

Hidan snarled again as he finally threw the pike like a javelin at Shikamaru and then used both hands to put more power behind the arc of the scythe that followed soon after, Thinking Shikamaru couldn't possibly escape both. But he did.

The Nara retracted his arm and swung with all his might, shoving chakra into the machete, concentrating it, and letting it come out in a dark wave that was similar to a wind-technique that he had altered and made his own. The wave rolled forward, knocking the pike away pushing Hidan several feet before dissipating as he stopped his attack to block it.

He heard Hidan swear and realized that while trying to keep himself upright his feet had slid backward and gotten stuck in the now swamp-like ground. So he took off like a bullet toward him, if he could just cut off the man's head then it would be over. This time, he'd cut Hidan into peices and bury each appendage in it's own little in-escapable hole all around the world.

He swung as he got close and resisted the urge to smile at Hidan's expression. With one chakra enhanced swing of the machete he knocked the Scythe from Hidan's hand, with a second swing he sliced through the retractable cord and it spun through the air, eventually catching itself, blades down, in the earth, abandoned.

Not wasting any time to watch it do that, Shikamaru slashed again with his weapon, putting as much power into it as he can as he aimed for Hidan's throat. The thought snuck into his mind that it had not been much of a fight, but was ripped away from him as the Jashinist pulled *another fucking stake* our from his other sleeve and blocked the attack, using Shikamaru's dismay against him and successfully shoving the weapon through his thigh.

Shikamaru cried out, He couldn't let Hidan taste the blood. He didn't think he'd be able to withstand the torture the Sadist probably had in mind if he managed to fall victim to that jutsu.

Screaming from the pain, he kicked forward with his impaled leg, catching Hidan off-guard and managed to knock him backward on his back. Also tearing what Shikamaru desperatley hoped was his last weapon from his grip.

He had the chance right now while Hidan was down to jump on top of him and slice his head off, but the pain in his leg was overwhelming and he needed to get this weapon out of it. He pushed off backward with his uninjured leg to put distance between them while Hidan slowly collected himself. Shikamaru didn't let his eyes leave his opponent as he gripped the end of the pike, gritted his teeth, and ripped it out. He couldn't stifle his outcry when it came free of his body, but he quickly tossed it into the air and used his

machete baseball-bat style to whack the bloodied weapon and send it flying off into the distance. Dear God he hope he calculated right, there should be some sort of little pond that it would land in if he did it right, contaminating his blood. He couldn't leave that stuff laying around with Hidan on the loose.

Speaking of whom, was currently repositioning his jaw back on his face. Shikamaru involuntarily shuddered at this but did not let his gaze move from Hidan's. That was the second time he'd seen the psycho do that.

"I gotta hand it to you Pineapple head. I knew you'd gotten better, but damn, I underestimated you." Took the time to rip off the soggy trenchcoat and toss it to the side. He was wearing plain-old bluejeans underneath, and Shikamaru just about smacked himself after his gaze lingered a little too long on the rain running off Hidan's chest.

"That's a pretty big word, Hidan. I'm so proud of you."

"Shut the fuck up!" The priest roared, taking off toward his scythe. Shikamaru wouldn't let him though, and he pushed through the immense pain in his leg and darted in the same direction. He couldn't let him get a weapon back, then he would have the upper hand, what with Shikamaru trying to fight through the pain in his thigh.

But he wouldn't make it in time, Hidan had gotten that half-second head start, and he couldn't beat him. He prepared the chakra and let loose another Shadow wave, making it as thin as he could and sending it flying toward Hidan with twice his speed. His opponent saw it too late and his dodge attempt failed, suddenly he was rolling backward and when he finally came to a stop the zealot was convulsing violently on the ground.

Shikamaru kept rushing toward the weapon, he needed to find the other pike too to ensure Hidan would not stumble across it. But that would come in a moment. He could not wield the scythe anywhere near as well as Hidan, and he could not knock it out of reach like he

had done with the much smaller weapon earlier. So, doing the only thing he could think of, he grabbed the handle and forced his chakra into it. If Hidan touched it, he would be sent into another seizure like the one he was recovering from now.

"MOTHERFUCKER!" Hidan roared, getting shakily to his feet, "What the hell kinda fucking shit is that? Damn! I think I pissed myself!"

Shikamaru didn't answer, he needed to get this man decapitated and incapacitated as fast as possible, his chakra reserves were running low and his leg was starting to go completely numb, making it incredibly hard to stand, let alone run around and dodge like he needed to to keep up with his opponent.

"I never doubted that you would be a great Jashinist." Hidan said, panting ever so slightly. "And that kinda sadistic shit right there just proves it."

"Shut up Hidan." He acted as if he wasn't even taking this battle seriously, he was obviously pissed off, but then again he always was. He wasn't absolutely furious like he had been in the battle with Sasuke. It seems the killing intent he'd had in the beginning had dulled significantly.

Suddenly Hidan cried out, something between a moan of joy and yelp of pain. And then he did it again before looking down and realizing what was going on.

Two of Shikamaru's three dimensional shadows had impaled him right through the calves. And two more had themselves firmly wrapped around his ankles.

"Son of a-GAH!" He said again as two more went through his wrists, and yanked him down onto his hands and knees. He looked up into Shikamaru's eyes, who'd stepped up to him and was glaring down at him.

He'd won, he'd done it. He'd beaten Hidan with no more injuries than the one he'd inflicted himself and the one on his leg.

"I think I *over* estimated you." The Nara said robotically.

Hidan was struggling against the restraints, but he still didn't seem as mad as he should be. This was unsettling to Shikamaru, something wasn't right here.

"Naah." Hidan replied nonchalant, tossing his silver hair out of his face. "I stopped trying to kill you about half way through."

"What?"

Hidan grinned up at him, licking his lips. "This is a pretty fucking submissive position you have me in here... I didn't know you felt that way about me." He laughed. "That's sexy, Pineapple head. Seriously."

"Shut up! Why did you change your mind?" Curiosity killed the cat, the spikey haired man knew all too well. But he had to know. Hidan had come back from the dead and stalked him for God-knows-how-long, and then puts up this sorry, half-assed excuse for a fight? Quite frankly it pissed him off, and humiliated him at the same time. He'd been so fucking scared at first.

"Wouldn't you like to know?" Hidan smiled up at him, and then his expression changed as he took a deep breath. Shikamaru stumbled back, and his stomach rolled violently as Hidan jerked upward, shrieking in ecstasy as he ripped himself from the hold of the shadow restraints.

Blood poured, Hidan was howling, and Shikamaru thought he was going to faint.

"OH FUCK ME THAT'S SO GOOD!" Hidan shrilled, then looked at Shikamaru, wobbling where he stood. He sneered, and within a second he suddenly maneuvered Shikamaru's weapon out of his

hand, slashed the remaining tentacles on his ankles, and tackled the spikey haired man, holding the blade to his throat as he straddled him.

The blood from Hidan's wrists pattered onto Shikamaru's cheek, and he winced with each drip. The rain washed it away immediatly, but it was still just... just awful feeling.

There was no way that had really just happened, Hidan was bleeding so heavily now that he would die temporarily of blood loss, but that didn't matter, seeing as Shikamaru was *not* immortal, and therefore having his throat cut open would not be just a minor setback as it would be for Hidan. How could he have possibly planned for this, How was Hidan even *holding* the fucking weapon so steadily with half his wrist detached from him.

"It would be really, *really* fucking nice if Kakuzu were here. Cause this is gonna take a long fucking time to heal on it's own." Hidan said, slurring slightly. He was already light headed, he would 'die' soon and Shikamaru could slice off his head and toss it in a bucket of concrete and then smash it with a sledgehammer. He just had to keep him talking.

"I-I thought you didn't want to kill me."

Hidan grinned, "Oh no, I still wanna fucking kill you. I just stopped trying. See, I realized that this was some sort of test. Jashin wanted to see if I, his most loyal desciple, could best you. " Hidan's teeth showed through his sneer. "His newest edition."

"You're lieing." Shikamaru immediatly said, still not letting himself beleive it.

"Nope. I'm not. But I figured, I'd see what you could do. Figure out why he sentenced you to death so soon after your conversion."

Shikamaru's eyes narrowed.

"I am NOT a part of your insane cult."

Shikamaru collects every ounce of chakra he can spare and compacts it into the form of energy that he refined especially to cause brief seizures, and he forces it all out through his neck, into the blade and into Hidan through all the connecting points. Hidan's body suddenly stiffens momentarily before he once again begins shaking violently and collapses sideways onto the ground. Shikamaru quickly rose shakily to his feet, and ripped his weapon from Hidan's hand. He was about sick of this back and forth powerplay. This was going to end now.

Hidan was gagging and choking and drooling on the ground, in such a humiliating state but somehow still aware enough to stare up at his opponent with a grin in his eyes. Blood stained the ground in the four spots around his wrists and calves as he writhed. It was a disheartening sight, even for Shikamaru. He almost felt sorry for him, He almost wanted to help. But he couldn't, and he wouldn't.

"Sucks to not have control of your body, doesn't it?" Shikamaru said, feeling sick as he watched the display. He knew his new jutsu's were morbid and varied on the edge of torture. That latest dose he'd given Hidan should have killed him, But the albino man was resisting as long as he could. He was putting up a good fight, honestly, but it was useless.

"Now you have a small dose of what Neji felt. I'd love to make you feel more, but you're too troublesome. And I'd like to get back to my life."

Hidan finally stopped seizing, and stared gasping at the sky. It almost looked like he was going to drown, but he finally managed to plop his head down sideways, and stared at Shikamaru. He was trying to say something, the Nara knew, but failed. It didn't matter now. The battle was over, and he was the victor, again. He'd be damned if he was ever scared of this sorry excuse for a Jashinist ever again.

He crouched down, lining up the machete with an invisible line on Hidan's throat. Hidan continued staring, how was he conscious? Let alone *alive* .

His violet eyes were still laughing at him. Daring him to do it while simultaneously telling him he couldn't. He didn't have it in him. He stared at him with condescending, slightly cloudy eyes. He still thought he was better, even after he'd lost and suffered this embarrassing defeat, he still thought he was smarter. Like there was something Shikamaru was overlooking.

Jashin.

Oh right. That was troublesome. He was apparently unwillingly devoted to the God of slaughter somehow. So what would it mean, to kill Hidan? Would he be fulfilling Jashin's wishes? Doing exactly what he wanted? What if he spared him, then Hidan was going to kill him, and probably go after Neji too.

He couldn't do that. He had to keep Hidan alive, but submissive.

He lifted the blade up, and an idea popped into his head. It was a longshot, but as unflinchingly devoted as Hidan was, maybe, just maybe it would work.

"Swear your loyalty to me and I won't cut off your head and toss you into the next concrete mixer I see."

The arrogance left Hidan's stare, it was replaced with confusion, disbelief, and interest." He laughed, or what Shikamaru was a laugh. It really was more of a gargling, coughing type noise.

"I'm not saying betray your God, but if I serve him too as you keep saying, then you can serve me. I've beaten you, twice now, and you know it will just keep happening. You either do what I say, or you die. You really and truly die this time. I do *make sure* that you do."

"Ggghh.. Faugggooo."

Shikamaru leaned closer, "You think I won't do it? I'll sacrifice your immortal soul to him, the person you devoted your life to. And I'll laugh as he passes his judgement. You've failed him so miserably, he's going to be *pissed*. "

This finally registered with Hidan. And after a staring match that felt like it dragged on for hours, he sighed and closed his eyes, looking back up at the sky. The rain stopped almost instantly at this, signaling that it was over. And Shikamaru almost started crying in relief.

Damn, he really hoped he knew what he was getting himself into.

A/N-

WHATTT Shika what the fuck are you doing you crazy bastard! Lol, I'm the puppetmaster here and I'm even kind of pissed!

Bahaha, ooh lordy. I keep stumbling randomly onto plots, and this one seemed pretty promising. Okay well, actually it was just the most entertaining. BUT STILL!

Hopefully everything was well explained. I got pretty excited so I'm sure there all kinds of typos and stuff and I apologize but there's no way in hell I'm waiting to put this fucker up.

So enjoy, and REVIEWW!

Lean on me

Recurring Nightmares

Exhaustion.

Exhaustion to the point of near death.

That was all he felt. It was all he could think about, he was so overtaken by it that he just wanted to collapse right where he was and sleep for *days*.

He couldn't though, not only would his head not stop spinning from all the thoughts spinning around in it, but he wasn't done. He had something to take care of, or *someone* more like.

Hidan was still laying, sprawled out on his back in a puddle of his own blood that was mixing in with the rain and mud. The Nara had done what he could to fix the deathless man's wounds, but it wasn't as if he'd been prepared for this, not in the least.

Damn it all, he was so sick of not knowing what to expect. Damn Hidan, Damn Jashin, damn what his life had been reduced to. Now he was responsible for this insane man as well as a follower of some terrible demonic religion.

He sighed and continued staring at him. His chest was rising and falling steadily, it if weren't for the terrible abuse on his body, one might think he was just taking a nap. The bruise on his ribcage seemed to continue to grow larger, and Shika honestly had no idea how to treat it. He'd never used that technique on a living thing since he'd perfected it, seeing as his only choices had been to use it on either Neji when he was still here and sparred with him, or himself via a clone.

He didn't even know what kind of damage it had done, though in all honesty the albinos skin looked like it was rotting. It was somewhere

in-between the normal purple color of a bruise and a dark green. Skin didn't turn green unless there was something horribly wrong with it. But hell, if anyone could take it, it was Hidan. The man healed with ridiculous speed. The spots on his wrists and calves that had been ripped open at first had been so deep that Shika could see his bone while cleansing them. He hadn't looked at them recently, seeing as they were wrapped with the remainder of his gauze. But they'd stopped bleeding shortly after they'd been treated. And wounds like that didn't stop bleeding until you were dead.

Speaking of which, he probably needed to get himself to the hospital for the hole residing in his thigh. It hurt so terribly bad that he'd all but forgotten about his hand and the large bruise on his jaw from where Hidan had landed that very first blow. He was a little concerned that he may have broken a few of his teeth from that too. But he didn't want to get up, he couldn't. Not right now, he was so fucking tired and his chakra was so low and he was in so much pain that just the thought of trying made him want to throw up.

He would just wait for Hidan to heal up, and then have the stupid fucker carry him home. He had to if he ordered him to, Shikamaru reasoned, smiling to himself.

On the one hand he had just put a terrible, massive burden on himself, but on the other, this was going to be entertaining, at the least. He had the man no one else could control wrapped around his finger now. Even Kakuzu couldn't order Hidan around without a fight. It was probably unrealistic to think that the idiot was just going to agree to whatever Shikamaru said without resistance, but it was a nice thought, a calming thought.

"I'm not going to serve Jashin though.." He muttered aloud. Maybe he'd accidentally sworn his loyalty to him. But he was going to fight every fucking step of the way. If he remembered correctly, all he had to do was give a little bit of his own blood each day and he would be left well enough alone. It was the absolute minimum requirement. And maybe he could manage that, he really didn't want to risk coming down with leprosy or cancer or some awful thing like that

just because he couldn't poke himself with a needle and draw a little blood.

He sighed, two years ago he would not even have considered letting thoughts like these into his head. What had he ever done so bad to make karma decide to introduce this man into his life. He could have been so happy and content right now. He'd had everything he ever could have wanted before this whole mess started.

"I hate you." He said to Hidan, and almost made the worst, most girliest squeal ever when the albino suddenly sat up and looked at him.

"Well I hate you too. Shit eater."

"I fucking hate you more!" He said, then hating himself for doing something so childish. "You ruined my life!"

"Hey! You wouldn't even have a life to be alive in if I wasn't such a nice fucking person!" Hidan shot back, attempting to get up but only falling onto his side. "DAMMIT! I can't even stand up! Look what you did to me!"

"YOU WERE TRYING TO KILL ME!"

"Well maybe you should have fucking let me." Hidan muttered, sitting himself back upright. "You hate your life anyway."

Shikamaru growled and let himself fall backward onto the swamp-like ground. This was surreal. He'd just been in a battle for his life and now they were sitting here arguing like a couple kids.

"I don't hate my life. I just miss my old one." He muttered, not expecting Hidan to actually hear. And if he did hear, not expecting him to respond.

"We all miss what we used to have." He said back in the same exasperated tone.

"Shut up."

"Make me."

"I *order* you to *shut up*! "

Shikamaru smiled at the silence that followed. Yes, this would certainly be entertaining, now that the deadly peril was over.

"No more trying to kill me." He said, "No more fucking with me. Don't even *threaten* my life."

"Yessir, Master sir." Hidan replied snarkily.

"Good. Now, take me to the hospital. I don't like pain, unlike you."

"Oh for fuck's sake you pansy! You want me to carry you bridal style?"

"At least find a damn phone and call an ambulance."

"Tch. C'mon pineapple head, I'm in worse shape than you. You'll pull through."

Shikamaru pushed himself up to glare at Hidan, who only returned it. "How can you act like this after what just happened!? Like everything's fine and this is a totally normal situation? I'm not immortal, I will die if my wounds get infected. I have a hole in my leg, I can *see through* my leg. This is going to take fucking forever to heal. You're my slave, do what I say!"

"Why don't you go suck a cock!?" Hidan just stared at him, obviously trying to fight the amusement in his voice. This was pissing Shikamaru off, why didn't he understand the seriousness of this? It wasn't a game, dammit!

He sighed. This was getting him nowhere. If he wanted Hidan to do anything for him, he had to make him think it was *his* idea. Reverse

psychology maybe? It was cliché all the other dumb ideas Shikamaru had tried had pretty well worked on him.

"Fine then. Let's just stay here. "

Hidan just grunted.

"Yeah, we'll stay here in this mud pit. You don't deserve a shower and a nice place to rest anyway. It's better here."

"You ain't gonna let me in your fucking house. So knock it off."

Hmm. Well that wasn't going to work. Or maybe he wasn't very good at it..

"Yeah. You're right. I wasn't. But you've broken in plenty of times before anyway."

Hidan smiled proudly. "You didn't exactly make it hard."

"I didn't know I needed to. But it's cool. I can just stay here and look at the clouds forever. Doesn't bug me. " With that Shikamaru plopped back down into the mud, wincing when even the movement and looked back up at the night sky. The clouds had vanished completely, leaving what would be a clear sky if not for all the lights and pollution blocking it out. He could see the moon, and maybe one star.

Oh, nope. That's a helicopter.

He closed his eyes, he could wait Hidan out. He may even doze a little. Soon he would get bored and probably start whining. He could be patient, he had been prepared to play the waiting game anyway before all that utter insanity had started.

He took a deep breath and counted to 10, and released it.

"I have some pills that would probably help." Hidan said somewhat sullenly. And Shikamaru let his brows arch up, but didn't open his

eyes.

"I don't do that stuff anymore."

"Yeah, I know. You're fucking boring. They're like antibiotic type shit. Pain releivers too."

Hmm. He could use some painkillers. All he had was over-the-counter meds at his house, and they wouldn't be enough for this.

"I told you no more trying to kill me."

"For fuck's sake dude I'm trying to help!"

"If you wanna help then take me to a damn hospital!"

He opened his eyes and sat up when he heard the Jashinist shift around, grunting and grumbling. When he managed to prop himself comfortably, Hidan had staggered to his feet. Shikamaru smiled inwardly. Hah, he was going to do it. Big bad Hidan was actually doing what he told him to do.

The albino man limped over to Shikamaru, and stood over him. Shikamaru held his gaze with a look that just dared him to try something. Hidan's eyes narrowed, and he held out his hand.

"I'll take you to your shitty apartment. I've seen Kakuzu wrap me up a million times, I'll do that for you and then you're on your own."

Shikamaru sighed and took his hand. He hissed as his new partner yanked him to his feet rougher than neccesary, but aside from a short glare, he didn't say anything. If he helped him to his house then he could call the damn ambulance himself. This had been one serious drag of a Sunday.

"Ahh Crap.." He said, and Hidan gave him an irritated look as he put one of the Nara's arms around his shoulder and let him lean his weight on him. Honestly, he wasn't sure why he was trusting him all the sudden, even with something like this. But it wasn't as if he had

much choice. "I have to call in..." He muttered, to which Hidan snorted in reply. "For like... a week, at the least."

"You're such a puss, pineapple head."

"Shut up Hidan."

That was probably the longest, most awkward trek of his life. The walk which usually took him twenty minutes had taken the two battered men nearly an hour. Granted, Hidan only seemed to get better and better as they trudged on in heavy, uncomfortable silence, but the opposite could be said for Shikamaru. His body ached like no tomorrow, his thigh was still lightly bleeding from the effort of walking, his hand was still throbbing and he couldn't feel a large portion of his face, and he felt as if he looked like the Hunchback of Notre Dame with how swollen he knew it was.

Hidan had absolutely insisted on grabbing his scythe, which Shika had to admit came in handy. At least every passerby kept to their own business. Normally he would have thought it rude that no one cared enough to ask if they needed any help, but in this case he just fucking wanted to go home and sleep. It didn't ease his irritation any that it was now well after dark and everyone they passed was most likely a drug dealer or hooker. At least those who looked at them as a potential target to rob took one look at Hidan and walked in the opposite direction. Apparently he had made a bit of a reputation for himself, and had somehow managed to keep it on the down low as well. Shikamaru certainly would have remembered hearing rumors about anyone even vaguely fitting Hidan's description.

The giant bruise on the zealot's side seemed to have finally stopped growing, though it was definitely more green now than purple. It took up pretty well the whole left half of his torso. Both of them hobbling down the street together was probably a pretty even mix of hilarious and just pitiful. He couldn't even think of the things people would assume they had been doing. They probably had them both pegged

at jutsu user's, which, depending on who you taked to and what neighborhood you were it, might be a bad thing.

Jutsu had been steadily declining in popularity, due to many people feeling threatened by those who misused it. It ended up getting several rules and regulations pinned to it's use, and was balancing very deliately on the edge of being banned all-together.

It was a chaotic world when people were able to do things they shouldn't be able to do with reckless abandon.

The city especially had a very strict policy on it, though it was hard to enforce seeing as anyone could call in with a complaint, and not have a single bit of proof. It was far too easy to kill someone with some sort of jutsu and not leave a single trace. That was why Shikamaru's law firm was so huge. And they only worked with the Southeastern portion of the city!

It was all a drag really. But, being in the firm and having his own special handy dandy little license, he was permitted to use it basically whenever, as long as he had a good reason. Sparring in the park with himself? Meh, no one had cared enough to call him in, thought that was usually why he tried to leave city limits, and he would still be doing this if a certian psycho hadn't made him too paranoid to drive his car.

"Hidan.." He croaked, when they were only a block away. (City block were rediculously long compared what 'a block' would be in his old town.) The man beside him remained silent but for a grunt.

"Why.. Why didn't you just attack me right away? Why'd you stalk me?"

He answered with a shrug, made very awkward because of Shikamaru's arm draped over his shoulders.

"How long have you been watching me?"

"A while." Hidan said, glaring at an underdressed woman who caught his eye. She averted her eyes and walked off down an alleyway.

"Why?"

"Why do you ask so many damn questions?"

"Oh, I don't know. Maybe because I didn't even fucking know you were alive until literally like an hour and a half ago! I didn't even know someone was following me around until a couple days ago!"

"I've been working on my flaws too, pineapple head." Hidan said with a toothy sneer.

"So you were using me for practice before you killed me?"

"You rationalize it any fucking way you want, fuckwit."

"If you'd answer the damn question-"

"Fuuck! This must be what Kakuzu always feels like!" Hidan interjected. "Jashin christ, if I tell you will you shut the hell up? This is weird enough without you fucking chatting me up. In case it's not obvious I'm not very fucking happy about this whole shitty situation."

"You mean you being my slave?"

"I'm not your fucking slave."

"Then what do you call it?"

"I'm loyal only to Jashin. He obviously has something in mind. I'm just going along with it until he gives me the okay to kill you."

"You can't kill me. I've beaten you twice now."

He could hear Hidan grinding his teeth, and decided he should probably stop provoking him. He was in a bit of a compromising position right now, it would be pretty easy for the man to just break

his neck or something. But he wanted to know the answers to his questions. He didn't have a clue as to what was going to happen when they reached his apartment complex. He could probably use the elevator and get to his own, as long as his 'slave' helped him up those initial few steps into the lobby. But whether Hidan would stick around or leave and go... wherever he'd been keeping residence, was a mystery.

Not saying he wanted him to stay, hell no. Maybe they were tolerating each other right now and acting vaguely buddy-buddy, but the man had mentally tortured him, tried to kill his ex-who-he-still-loved, and somehow managed to come back from the dead and then tried to kill Shikamaru himself! Hidan was absolutely unpredictable, and Shikamaru hated it with every fiber of his being. No wonder he kept screwing up, how the hell was he every supposed to make rational decisions when facing such an irrational opponent!?

"It's a pretty simple explanation. You're thinking too fucking hard on it." Hidan muttered, interrupting him from his thoughts. "I just wanted to see what I was dealing with. It took me awhile to track you down. And I was actually looking for the princess. I was planning to deal with you later."

Shikamaru counted to ten to control the anger at Hidan's easy admittance of this. He just told him he still wants to kill Neji as if it were no big deal. Like he was really just going to be okay with it, like he wasn't going to do everything in his power to keep it from happening.

"But when I finally found you, he wasn't around. He fucked you over pretty bad huh? I couldn't help myself, you were so pathetic that I had to watch. I was just waiting for the day when you finally decided to kill yourself. I was gonna jump in and offer Jashin's bounty to you, and kill you myself if you rejected. But damn Pineapple head, You surprised me, coming around on your own like that."

"It wasn't intentional."

"Oh yes it was. You just think it wasn't."

"... Have you ever thought of making sense when you talk?"

Hidan sighed dramatically, but as long as the subject was Jashin, he didn't seem to mind dishing out info. "You were desperate for a way out, you idiot. You accepted him mentally without even knowing it. That darkness you felt? That numb sensation, it was him knocking at the door. Jashin is scary clever, even more than you. After that all that was left was finding some way to make you think that doing what you did was your idea and not something he was 'suggesting' to you while you slept."

Shikamaru was speechless. How did he possibly know all this? How could he have known how he was feeling? How did he know about the nightmares?

Hidan continued on, oblivious to Shikamaru's smouldering anger.

"I helped a little bit, with the whole tire thing. I thought it was a stupid idea too, I mean, I knew there was no fucking way you weren't gonna catch on. But who am I to question Jashin almighty? I guess I gave you more credit than you deserved in the end eh?"

Shikamaru just wanted to go to sleep. He wanted to go to sleep and never wake up.

He didn't know what to even think now. This was all far too supernatural for his logical mind. He... he was out of his league. What Hidan was saying sort of made sense in some crazy way, but it was just so far-fetched that it didn't make sense at all. Shikamaru was going to blow a circuit if he didn't get home and get some rest.

"I... I can't handle all this." He admitted aloud. He didn't know if he was saying it to himself or his unlikely new "friend", but it was already out there.

"Tch, and I thought your boy-toy was the drama queen." Hidan muttered as they at long last arrived at the entrance to the complex he lived in.

Shikamaru let it go. His energy was gone, he had nothing left to fuel any more arguing. He waited for Hidan to stop helping him limp along and leave, but he didn't. He continued on right up the few stairs and only removed Shikamaru's arm to open the door. After the Nara hobbled inside and started making his way to the elevator, he still heard footsteps behind him. He pressed the button and shifted to lean against the wall, giving Hidan a questioning look.

Hidan didn't notice right away, he was inspecting the diseased-looking side of his body, making a bit of a disgusted face.

"Hidan."

The man 'Hmm'd' in response but continued poking at the sickly green flesh.

"Er.. are... Are you like, coming with me?"

Hidan stopped amidst what he was doing and turned to look at Shikamaru. The look on his face made Shikamaru blush even though he hadn't meant it at all like that. And of course the blush just made it worse.

"Aahhh pineapple head are you coming on to me?"

"NO! Dammit I didn't mean it like that! "

Hidan just laughed and made a seductive face. But Shikamaru continued before he could say anything.

"I thought you'd probably dump me at the entrance and take off. I can make it the rest of the way myself."

Hidan went back to the signature grin. "Chill the fuck out, I told you I was gonna help you fix up your leg. I don't break my word, unless

some goddamn spikey haired motherfucker forces me too."

It was Shikamaru's turn to be amused. Why he found it funny was a bit of a mystery. He supposed the thought that Hidan had the same notion about him that the Nara did was... what was the word? It added another dimension to Hidan, a little more humanity. Shikamaru knew that once before, a long time ago. That deep down the insane satal masochist was still a person with wants and needs like everyone else.

"Huh, I didn't know the great and mighty immortal Hidan had morals."

Hidan scowled at this. "How many fucking times to I have to tell you. You and everyone else. I'm a nice fucking guy as long as you don't piss me off. I'm about tired of putting forth the fuckin' effort when no one ever believes me."

"It's hard to beleive when you keep trying to kill everyone you're trying to convince."

Hidan looked almost as if he'd been slapped, and Shikamaru couldn't stop the laugh that burst from him. Why was he laughing? This wasn't funny! Hidan treated lives like objects instead of... instead of lives!

But he kept chuckling, it made his aches and pain all the worse but he couldn't stop himself. He was so tired, he almost felt like he was stoned.

"You.." Another giggle. "It really never occured to you to *not* kill someone just because they irritate you?"

Another round of laughter, and now even Hidan was staring at him like he'd lost it.

The elevator dinged and Hidan had to shove him in when the door opened as he tried desperatly to control his mental meltdown.

But why? Why was this any different than any other stressful situation?

He'd wanted to fall over and die when he humiliated himself waaay back when he'd first asked Neji on a date. When he first started at his old firm he'd been so overwhelmed that he'd mistakenly asked his supervisor if he had any pot, thinking he had dialed Choji, one of his closest friend back then. When his father passed away he'd thought there was no way he'd ever be happy again. And learning of Asuma's death had hurt him so badly that he had more or less been in denial ever since.

Two years ago the life of the man he loved was resting completley in his hands, and he'd barely managed to keep him alive. And then he'd left him despite it all.

And he'd managed to keep his head, but now, in front of the last fucking person in the world that he wanted to ever, EVER see again, he was crumbling, with no one but the man who'd just tried to kill him to lean on.

His life was so utterly fucked that... that he didn't even know how to finish this thought.

He didn't think he was laughing anymore now. But everything seemed hazy, like it wasn't really happening. His body felt so heavy, but light at the same time. And damn, he hurt. He hurt everywhere, in places he hadn't even been injured in.

He vaugley heard someone ask for his keys, and without even thinking about it he reached into his back pocket to get them, and handed them over.

Soon after that his face hit something soft, and he almost cried in relief at not having to stand up anymore before he realized he couldn't breathe. He forced himself to roll onto his back. Damn... he was so hot. *I think I'm sweating...*

"Why's it so fuckin' hoooot?" He asked whoever it was that was with him. He knew someone was, he couldn't remember who though. Holy shit why was it so hot? Was someone burning him? Jesus christ he was on fire!

Someone said something to him. He tried to tell them he couldn't hear them, that they were too far away but he couldn't because he was suddenly being shaken.

What the hell is going on here? Was there a fire *and* an earthquake?

Something cold was on his forehead now, damn it felt good, he reached up and grabbed it. It kept trying to pull away.

"Sss... stop it. Feels good." He said. Holy crap, he didn't feel good. Oh god... he was... he was gonna throw up. Oh no.

"Trassshhhcannn..." he moaned. He heard someone shout and the cold object was ripped away.

Oh no... ohh no. He was gonna spew, he was definitely gonna spew. Where'd that person go? Who was that? Who was with him? He didn't have any friends, not since Neji left.

Neji!? Was it Neji?! Was he back?

Something metallic clanged, and he was being lifted up and leaned forward so his head was between his knees.

"Neji... Neji.. are you here?"

He heard someone in return, it was muffled and far away. And damn he was still hot, he was so hot he was gonna, gonna...

He faintly heard what sounded like a five gallon bucket being dumped into another bucket.. and everything went dark.

Nightmares. Always nightmares.

Some had Neji, some had Hidan. Some even had Itachi and Sasuke. Some had his old friends, damn he missed them. He missed friends.

Why the hell had he resorted to being alone all the time? He didn't wanna be alone. He wasn't a people person really, but he didn't want to be completely alone.

Then there were these other weird dreams. He wasn't sure what was going on. He was laying in bed, always laying in his bed. He thought he was in his apartment, but he never dreamt of that. All he knew was he was in a bed, and he felt horrible. He couldn't get his eyesight to focus for more than a moment. And his entire body hurt, it hurt so bad. His leg was the worst, some days the pain was so bad he thought he was dying. And everything would go dark.

Sometimes there was someone there, they talked to him. But they weren't nice, sometimes he was even yelled at. Occasionally it felt like someone might even be slapping him.

He knew it wasn't Neji. He was always nice. But he couldn't think of anyone on earth that could be here. Neji had left... he left awhile ago.

Who was it? Who the hell was here?

Why couldn't he wake up? He should have woken up by now. He always woke up after everything went black.

Damn it he was so tired of being confused all the time. Why didn't someone just answer him? Why can't he just know what to do? How to make this pain go away, all this pain. Oh bloody hell why did everything hurt so bad? Why was he so hot? Why couldn't it just go away, he didn't want to hurt anymore... He was so tired of hurting. It wasn't fair, he tried so fucking hard. He was trying to move on and he was trying to be a normal person. He wasn't doing a very good job but dammit HE WAS TRYING!

He opened his eyes, and for once he could see. He could focus for more than a second, and he could make out... his apartment ceiling?

Yeah, that's what it was. It was the ceiling. He took a deep breath and let it out, blinking slowly. He was awake now, he had to be awake. He didn't dream of his apartment.

There was something on his forehead, and he reached up to touch it, his breath hissed in when he flexed his fingers though. That was sore, really sore. He held it above his head so he could focus on it. It was all wrapped up, the bandages looked fresh. What happened to his hand.

Remembering the object on his forehead, he let his hand down to touch it. It was wet.. It was.. a rag? A wet rag on his head. What the hell was going on?

He felt so weak, damn, what the hell happened to him?

He wanted to sit up, he had to. And taking another breath, he forced himself to do so. He was a little dizzy for a moment, and felt kinda nauseous. But he kept himself upright.

His leg, his thigh to be exact, was throbbing so hard it made him wince repeatedly. Wait.. he remembered this, his leg had hurt so bad in all those weird half-lucid dreams...

He gingerly pushed the covers down to find his leg heavily wrapped with gauze that smelled so strongly of antiseptic that he retracted the blanket. And just then his bedroom door opened. Upon seeing those violet eyes and slicked-back silver hair everything came flooding back to him.

Hidan.. he was here? He remembered being with him in front of the elevator, he'd been making jokes about Shikamaru wanting him. And he'd started laughing and couldn't stop.

"Holy shit you're alive." Hidan said in monotone. Then his shoulders slumped and he grinned. "Oh dear Jashin, that was the worst torture of my life. Damn pineapple head, Don't ever get sick again. I'm not your fucking mommy okay?"

Shimamaru's confusion must've shown on his face, because Hidan gave him an agitated sigh and came further into the room. He was wearing a plain white t-shirt and gray sweats. Shikamaru wasn't sure why he noticed that, or why he was thinking that he looked good in casual clothes like that when there were so many questions for him to ask.

"You ain't still hallucinating are you? Fuck that was annoying as all hell."

"Hallucinating?" Shika asked, his voice sounding like he hadn't used it for awhile.

"Yeah man! Damn people say I'm whiney but you could win a fucking award for that shit. 'Neji, Neji come back, I looove you!'" He said the last in a dramatic and admittedly whiny voice. "Kept fucking crying and shit. I've never seen a more pathetic excuse for a grown ass man In all my life. I swear I was so close to just smothering you with a fucking pillow."

Shikamaru processed this, and still understood nothing.

"What happened?"

Hidan rolled his eyes and crossed his arms, shrugging. "Ah, you freaked shit cuz your leg got infected and it got all in your bloodstream. You were out for days."

There. That answered quite a few questions. He didn't have a nervous breakdown, he was sicker than all hell. He thought he was on fire from a fever. Those dreams weren't dreams at all, at least not all of them. He'd been teetering on the edge of conciousness. For days apparently... wait WHAT?!

"Days!?" The Nara yelped. "Oh shit I'm gonna lose my fucking job! Where the hell is my phone! Did they call? Oh damn it all I'm so screwed-"

"Oi! Calm down! Damn, I told'em you had a bloodstream infection. They even sent a fuckin' guy over, guess they thought you were playin' hookey or some shit. Chill the fuck out."

"You.. you covered for me?"

Hidan made a face, as if wondering why he did it as well. "Well.. huh. Yeah I did... ain't gonna fucking happen again though. So get your pansy ass outta bed."

Shikamaru was.. was... was what? He didn't even know...

A bloodstream infection? Damn, Hidan had... *taken care* of him? Even called into work so he wouldn't get fired..

WHAT THE HELL WAS GOING ON!?

He'd just been trying to kill him and now all the sudden he's saving his life?

What the actual fuck?

"Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why'd you... do this?"

Hidan was quiet for a moment, his expression looking as if he'd just eaten rotten food. "I don't fucking know.."

"Hidan.. you had to have a reason. You don't do anything without reason."

Hidan looked sideways at him. And it occurred to Shikamaru that he had accidentally given him a compliment. Saying he actually thought things through instead of just brainlessly charging into strange situations.

It was true though, a few years back when he'd actually almost thought of the religious man as a friend they'd had a conversation about basically the same thing. Hidan was secretly smarter than people gave them credit for. And quite honestly it was a hell of a strategic move, and also quite a burden. After hearing something so many times you start to believe it. Shikamaru had been under the same pressure, but in the opposite way. Everyone always looked to him for advice. When there was trouble, he was the person they called. Everything was always on his shoulders. He didn't realize how much he actually missed that until now.

"Jashin has a plan for you. If he wanted you to die then I would have killed right away. Besides, you told me not to try to kill you anymore. Just leaving and letting you die would basically be the same fuckin' thing."

Shikamaru's spirits dropped at the reminder of his newfound religion. Not that they'd been too high in the first place. But they were helped just slightly by the fact that Hidan's deathwish for him seemed to have truly vanished. It was strange that it would happen so suddenly and easily. He'd really never thought of the zealot as the easily forgiving type.

Even if he had used his God as an excuse *again*, there seemed to be some sort of almost unnoticable change in his overall demeanor.

It all made sense, but still didn't.

What concerned him was Hidan's constant mentioning of 'Jashin's plan', the concept in itself was foreboding and being more or less helpless to determine what it was was just a really huge drag.

This was the God of slaughter and chaos we were talking about here. If he wanted something from Shikamaru then there was a pretty good fucking chance that he wasn't going to be saving the president or ending world hunger.

"Well... thank you."

Hidan grimaced. "Oh jeez don't get all fucking girly on me. We're even now okay?"

"Even?"

Hidan looked at him like he was the dumbest thing he'd ever seen. "Yea. Even. You need me to spell it out for you?"

That was all the more explanation he was going to get out of the Jashinist, (he needed to stop referring to him that way seeing as he apparently was one too) because with that he stalked from the room, saying something about getting some fresh air.

But Shikamaru wasn't stupid in the least. He knew what he meant now. He could have killed Hidan, and seeing as he'd more or less done it once and he'd escaped, he was one of the few people who would know how to keep him dead. Keeping Shikamaru alive had been his begrudging way of saying thanks.

The immortal really was scared of death after all.

A shower had been both absolute bliss and pure torture. He hadn't even realized how disgusting he'd felt until he was underneath the stream of water, he still had mud caked in places that even sunlight didn't reach.

At least he could take solice in the fact that Hidan hadn't given him any sort of spongebath. That would have been going a little too far. He was grateful for the help, really. But the absolute last thing he ever wanted was another dose of trauma relating to that man.

But, when the soapy rinse water ran into his just-barely-starting-to-heal leg wound, it was a whole other kind of hell. In retrospect, taking the bandages off had been an utterly brainless move. He should have decked the damn thing out with seliphane wrap. He knew he had some around here somewhere..

But, after rinsing the hell out of it and limping out and drying off, he almost felt like a whole new person. And Hidan's presence had completley slipped his mind in his ecstasy of relief from being back to a somewhat normal routine. In just over an hour he'd gotten himself something to eat, ate it, put his hair up, and had just sat down in his easy chair and lit up a cigarette when Hidan came swooping in the window.

"HOLY SHIT!" The spikey hair yelped, nearly jumping out of his own skin.

Hidan just brushed off his pants legs and straightened up, grinning.

"I forgot about you.." Shikamaru explained, searching frantically for his cigarette before it caught something on fire. He finally found it and quickly extinguished it. He hated wasting them like that but his heart was already going a million miles an hour at the moment, he didn't need nicotine to make that any worse.

"Well damn. Wish I'd known that, I would've just fucking left."

"Where'd you change at?" Shika asked before he could stop himself. Good God was he ever gonna stop that crap?

Bad brain. Stop it. Just quit. That's a no-no.

Hidan gave him a skeptical glance before plopping down and making himself comfortable on the loveseat. "You think I've just been fucking camping out on your window ledge for 4 months?"

The Nara's brow raised. So that's how long he'd been there. He had to give him a little credit, or maybe he should just be scolding himself

for not even suspecting that someone was there watching his every move that whole time.

"Well I'm never really sure what to expect from you." He admitted.
"Why are you still here?"

"Well damn I'll fucking leave! I thought you wanted me to hang around, mister swear-your-loyalty-to-me-or-die."

Oh, right... *that*.

"I didn't mean it like that!" The Nara said as Hidan shifted to get up. He was a little disturbed at the small amount of panic he'd had when he realized he really was going to leave. "I just wasn't sure like... what to do now, I guess."

"Tch, don't look at me. This was your retarded idea."

"Hey! I was trying to stay alive!"

Hidan just rolled his violet eyes and moved back to his original position, with the addition of his arms spread across the back of the couch. "You mortals are so fucking indecisive. You sit there and beg for death but when your wish gets granted you turn around and whine about how you wanna live."

Again Shikamaru's brow raised. "I don't ever remember wanting to die."

"No, but you sure as hell were content to sit there and waste the life you cling to so desperately."

That... that kinda hurt. It hit a little too deep and rung a little too true for Shikamaru's liking. The fact that Hidan knew how depressed he was when the Nara himself hadn't even been very aware of the problem really put things in perspective. He had been just coasting along, waiting for his problems to suddenly fix themselves and

begging for relief from the pain and the nightmares while not really willing to do anything to help himself.

"And who the hell are you to talk?" He said, a little shocked at how hostile the question came out. "What good have you been doing with your immortal life? You just spent four months doing nothing but watching me do nothing. And even before that all you did was get fucked up on drugs and wreak havoc!"

"I didn't just sit here and watch you the whole fucking time you conceited fucker!" Hidan snapped back in the same tone. "Just because killing you was on my list of shit to do doesn't mean you're the center of my universe!" He leaned forward now, every movement and feature radiating his attempt to control his agitation. At least Shikamaru could appreciate his restraint. It wouldn't have been anything like this a few years ago.

"I don't have to fucking explain myself to you. I can't die, I have all the time in the world. *You...*" Something in his eyes shifted as he paused. Shikamaru couldn't really decide what it was, but it bothered him.

"You only have a certain amount to get your shit in order, to make an impact in history, then you die. You die and life goes on like you never fuckin' existed."

Shikamaru was silent, unsure how to respond. This conversation had somehow taken a very dark turn. He was seeing bits and peices of Hidan that he had the feeling hadn't been seen by too many people.

"And I'll fucking tell you from experience pineapple head, It ain't an easy thing to do.." His head fell back onto the loveseat, and his violet eyes scanned the ceiling for just a second before closing.

Shikamaru remembered his last conversation with Asuma suddenly. When he'd explained everything that he'd figured out. The darkest, most disturbing fact being that Hidan really had died once for real. But Jashin had brought him back. How long he'd been dead was

something he had no way of knowing. Hidan looked only a few years older than himself, maybe 5 at the most. But was that *truely* his age or one of the perks of immortality?

Shikamaru realized something that he had never even bothered to think about before. Hidan, like anyone, had a past. He had a childhood and went through puberty and all those stages of life just like everyone did.

Maybe he'd even died an old man, and Jashin had put his soul into his younger body, or even someone elses all together...

And with nothing more than that train of thought, this psycho satal madochistic muderer of a man suddenly became a puzzle that Shikamaru was unhappy to find out he was interested in solving.

But, this was enough for now. He had all he needed to keep his head busy for awhile. And seeing as this time neither he nor anyone he knew was under a death threat, he actually had time to think about it.

"Why didn't you just take me to the hospital?" Shikamaru said, breaking the awkward silence.

"You didn't fucking need it. Be happy, I saved you money."

"I don't care about money! I almost died!"

Hidan's head snapped up and he looked at Shikamaru with a mixture of disbeleif as well as childlike amazment at hearing such a thing. And the spikey haired man couldn't quite hide his amusement at this.

"What? Is it so weird that I care more about my life than saving a few hundred bucks?"

"Uh, yeah. It is. I thought everyone was obsessed with money."

"... Why would you think that?" Shikamaru asked, chuckling. He vaugly remembered one of Kakuzu's traits as being a Scrooge. Or at least he'd deduced so from a comment Itachi made once and then

another when Kakuzu had mentioned something about 'protecting his investments' of the several times Neji had forced Shikamaru to go have a chat with him.

He could sort of understand Hidan's puzzlement, He couldn't die, so obviously he probably had never been to the hospital. Or at least not since his immortality kicked in, which could be any undetermined amount of time. Kakuzu, being more experienced as well as terrifyingly strong, most likely rarely sought out medical help, if ever. In afterthought, taking Shikamaru to the hospital had not been an option through no fault of Hidan's.

"I don't know! You mortals are always doing stupid shit for meaningless possessions. People kill each other over money, girls will have sex with you just to earn some, people rape and pillage and plunder for it. Hell even that little Uchiha twit was willing to go to jail for it. And that family is so fucked that they make their own standard of 'normal'." Hidan paused for a moment, looking at the reaction on Shikamaru's face. "I just figured it was one of those things I'd never understand. I don't judge you for it, I just don't fuckin' get it."

"Well.." Shikamaru said, still smirking a little. "It *is* important, but it's not the *most* important. I'd take saving the life of someone I cared about over a million dollars anyway, wouldn't you?"

"Tch, I don't care about anyone."

"What about Kakuzu? You and him are still a..thing.. right?"

"Hey. Keep your mind on your own personal life eh? It's none of your damn business. I'm not gonna sit here gossiping with you about my sex life, I'm not a damn woman."

Shikamaru held up his hands in surrender and shifted himself in his chair so he could rock, then lit up another cigarette. There were a few nice moments of silence before Hidan piped up again.

"You didn't get any money for saving me." He said, only the slightest teasing tone in his voice. Shikamaru just sighed, knowing what was coming.

"You *liiike* me huh Pineapple head? You wanna peice of this?"

"Shut up Hidan."

"Don't be embarrassed, I often cause feelings in other people that they don't fucking understand."

"Stop quoting movies."

"Damn you're just as boring as Kakuzu."

"And you're insane."

"But it turns you on huh?"

"Shut *up*, Hidan."

"Are you gonna make me?"

" *I order you to shut the hell up!*"

Hidan huffed and flopped onto the couch. And Shikamaru smiled.

Yea, this would be entertaining.

A/N- Mreee! Woow that feels like it took so freeking long. Ugh, it always seems so much longer on my phone than when I transfer it to computer.

But, yeah. Here you are my lovelies. One more chapter! Feed, feed and grow strong and use your strength to REVIEW! 3

The Unexpected

Recurring Nightmares

"God dammit Hidan where the hell did all my food go!?"

"It's Jashin, and I got fucking hungry."

"So go eat your own food!"

"Why would I eat mine when I can eat yours?"

Shikamaru growled and slammed his cabinet shut. "No more coming over when I'm not here." He said, limping out of the kitchen with the phone book. "And you're going to get the damn pizza since you ate everything."

"Pizza? Like fresh made from the resturaunt?" Hidan's head poked out of the bathroom as he spoke.

Shikamaru looked at him weird. It had been 4 days now since that weird little conversation they'd had. And Hidan had pretty much made himself at home in Shikamaru's apartment. He showed up and left whenever he wanted, no matter what Shikamaru was doing, and continued to wreak havoc on his mental state. Shikamaru was about at his wits end with his recent childish behavior. Even this little peculiar question didn't amuse him. Apparently Hidan never got to have a lot of the normal luxuries of life when living with Kakuzu.

"Uh, yeah. /Maybe/ you can have some if you manage to not eat it on the way back, drop it, or sacrifice it for having the wrong toppings."

"Why the fucking hell would I sacrifice a pizza?"

"The same reason you do a lot of the weird shit that you do."
Shikamaru sighed, running his finger down the page until he found

the restaurant he was looking for.

"Hey, I'm fucking older than you, quit talking to me like that. I've had enough of your gay rules."

Shikamaru ignored him as he punched in the number on his landline. His cell kept getting stolen, and he'd resorted to a home phone about 3 and a half months ago.

He paused, gritting his teeth. It was probably Hidan who kept taking them.

Sighing, he hit the call button. "Don't say anything while I'm ordering." He said before a woman's voice spoke to him through the receiver.

"Go fuck yourself.." Hidan's bodiless voice muttered from the bathroom. What the hell was he doing in there?

The Nara placed his order, and after being informed of the price and when it would be ready, hung up. He listened for a second, trying to figure out what Hidan was up to. He gave up after a few minutes. "Get out of my bathroom!"

"Quit fucking ordering me around!"

"Well quit messing with my stuff!"

There was silence for awhile, except for the occasional clacking of things being moved around. Shikamaru just sighed. It had been surprisingly easy to get used to Hidan's continued presence, though honestly he wasn't sure why he insisted on being around so much. He had nothing for the man-child to do while he lazed about the apartment waiting for his wounds to heal. And honestly, didn't he have better things to do anyway? He'd just made that whole speech about how Shikamaru wasn't the 'center of his universe', yet he never seemed to be gone for very long. At least he had the decency not to show up at night when Shika was trying to sleep. His

nightmares had lessened, but he still didn't want Hidan knowing he was still having them. Even though he probably did anyway. He was happy to say that Hidan hadn't made an appearance in them either, so there was no reason for him to tease Shikamaru anymore about having secret 'desires' for the psycho.

"Hey pineapple head," Hidan said, suddenly beside his recliner. Shikamaru jumped and then glared at the albino, who wasn't laughing at him but looked like he wanted to. He continued on. "Have you been praying?"

"What?" He replied, damn he hated these random questions.

"Have? you? been? praying?" Hidan said, seperating the words like he was about to scold a child.

"Uhh... No? Why would I?"

The (fellow) Jashinist looked at him in disappointment. "That's probably why you're not better yet."

"Hidan.." Shikamaru spoke with his fatigue unhidden, pinching the bridge of his nose. "Normal people take a long time to heal from stuff like this. Like, months, and years before it's nothing but a scar."

"Yeah, I know that. I'm not fucking retarded. But you're not normal. You have Jashin's strength at your disposal. But he doesn't just give his shit out freely. Jashin hates people who rely on others to do what they could do themselves, it's just a crutch."

"Is that why you've been eating all my food?" Shikamaru nearly groaned. He didn't want to talk about this. Hidan had thankfully not brought it up at all lately. But Shika preferred it stayed that way. He didn't *want* to be a Jashinist. He wasn't going to embrace it.

"Hey, when I'm hungry, I find food and eat it. I don't wait around for you to buy it, cook it, and serve it to me on a silver platter. But that's besides the point..." Hidan popped his knuckles as he spoke,

bending his fingers at angles that made it seem like he was actually breaking them.

"You have to thank him for what he gives you. You need to do some meditating, start having chats with him. "

"Why would I want to do that?"

"Hidan looked at him, exasperated. "Shikamaru." He said seriously, and the Nara got goosebumps as those violet eyes bored into him. Hidan never called him by his actual name. *Never.*

"You have no idea what kind of fucking power you're passing up by not doing this. C'mon, I know you think it's wrong or whatever the hell goes on underneath that spikey ponytail of yours, but make the best out of a bad situation. Drink some lemonade."

Shika continued staring, eventually unable to keep the smirk from his face. Drink some lemonade? It was close enough that he understood the saying that Hidan was attempting to use. But the fact that he was so serious and so far off... he just couldn't take him seriously.

"I looked into your weird demon God a couple years ago. I'm perfectly fine healing at the pace of a normal human being in exchange for keeping my blood in my body."

Hidan looked at him crookedly. "Where the hell did you find the shit you keep saying you looked up?"

"Internet."

Hidan tsk'd and shook his head, then waved his hand at the Nara before continueing. "Anyway, it's really not as bad as you're making it. You know that fat person disease where they have to prick their finger and shit every day? It's the same fuckin' thing. You just need like 5 drops instead of one."

Shikamaru sighed. He wasn't gonna drop this, not until he gave in and humored him. "Why can't you let this go?"

"Hey, you got yourself into this, you gotta accept it, seriously. I can't let it go because this is my fucking livelihood, pineapple head. This is my everything. And it's my job to spread the word and teach those willing to be taught... even the unwilling."

They stared at each other, Shikamaru looking like he was about to haul off and smack the zealot. He would be a terrible teacher, first of all. And second, that didn't even make sense.

So Jashinism kept itself from dying off by metaphorically raping people and forcing them into accepting Jashin and his nonsense? Yeah, that definitely sounded like something he could see himself doing for the rest of his life.

"If you go get the damn pizza, I'll think about considering it *maybe*."

"If I go get the pizza will you at least watch me while I do it? It's not like you just become a Jashinist and then run around sacrificing people. What I do takes years and years of hard fucking devotion and work. You are on step one." Hidan held his finger up mere inches from Shikamaru's face to emphasize the point. There he went again, talking about killing people as if it were the most natural thing in the world. People with husbands or wives and children to leave behind. People with promising futures ahead of them. It made no difference to Hidan, if Jashin decided he wanted them, they were dead.

He slapped it away and tried to glare at Hidan, but he was already mentally exhausted from this argument. He wasn't going to let it drop until Shikamaru caved at least a little.

"Fine. But I want to eat first, and take a shower, and I need to change my bandages. So go get the food, bring it back, and go find something to do for a couple hours."

"Dammit! Quit ordering me around like that, you're pissing me off with that shit!" Hidan growled, but opened the door behind him. He paused for a moment and narrowed his eyes. "And I'm eating some of that damn pizza. So suck a dick."

With that the door clicked shut, and Shikamaru sighed dramatically and flung himself backward into his recliner. At least he was using the door and not climbing in and out of the ten story window. Having Hidan sworn to you was almost like adopting a teenager.

God damn troublesome.

Hidan sat in the living area relaxing in Shikamaru's chair, eating his pizza and watching a horror movie where some woman was cut in half by a chainsaw and tossed into a pit of inbred cannibal mutants. It didn't hinder his appetite at all, Hidan had devoured a whole pizza by himself.

Shikamaru had used his distraction to take a quick shower, or as quick as he could hobble himself in and out. It was weird knowing that the unpredictable man was there just in the other room, but he didn't think he'd really be thoughtless enough to barge in on him.

He did lock the door though, just in case.

When he finally left the bathroom, Hidan was sitting crosslegged on the floor staring at him expectantly.

Shikamaru stared at him while he finished drying his hair, really? He couldn't wait ten damn minutes?

"Not on the carpet." He said tiredly.

Hidan grimaced. "You have carpet everywhere."

"I'm renting Hidan, blood stains carpet."

"Well. You have to get a little bloody."

"Well then I'm not doing it."

"BUT YOU SAID-"

"I know what I said, but I could get kicked out for that! I don't have anywhere to go. Do you know how hard it is to find a decent apartment for reasonable prices that's not in an awful neighborhood?"

Hidan's gaze dropped to the carpet, brows furrowed, and he chewed the inside of his lip in thought. Shikamaru gave a small huff of a laugh before going back into the bathroom to put his hair up in its usual ponytail. He was actually kind of embarrassed that he'd just walked out with it down. No one saw him with his hair down, except Neji.

Why he was embarrassed, he didn't know. He reasoned with himself that he didn't want to give Hidan the impression that he was that comfortable around him. But at the same time he really shouldn't give a damn. And he really shouldn't be hiding in the bathroom obsessing over it.

It didn't matter, he told himself. Not in the least, Hidan was just a temporary acquaintance until he gathered the shards of his life back together and sorted out this whole Jashinism mess.

He just had to figure out how to keep Hidan away from Neji. And that was going to be rather difficult. He had the feeling that the man was just going along with it for his own means. And especially now that he was trying to show him how to do things. He was just trying to get Shika to go to the dark side.

Well two could play that game. If it was a battle of wits Hidan was after, he was pretty dumb.

When Shikamaru exited the bathroom, Hidan was still in the same spot, looking at him happily again. Now with a pair of sheets spread out under him.

"Those better not be mine." Shika said instantly. Hidan just waved his comment away.

"I'll replace them. C'mon you said you'd do it, don't break your fucking word."

"I said I'd watch."

"Dammit you pineapple headed fuck! I'm trying to fucking help you! Will you stop being such a stubborn little bitch? You can save the sheets so you don't have to make your circle again, it's better to use fresh blood but it'll still work."

Shikamaru just eyed him warily.

"Come here before I make you." Hidan said slowly, spacing out the words, his voice low.

Damn, give him an inch and he takes a mile.

"Such a drag.." Shikamaru sighed. But he started forward anyway. Why he was giving in was beyond him. He was easy-going at heart, and fighting a useless battle was.. well, it was useless.

To look at this from another angle, if Jashin was going to help him get better faster, then he could work on unweaving this tangled web all the sooner. He still had no idea how to get out of this stupid commitment to his religion, he still pretty well considered himself an atheist, even though technically that was bullshit. He didn't want or need a god. It just complicated everything, and his life was proof enough of that.

He sat down in front of Hidan and stared at him boredly, but the albino just smiled back. It was an actual smile too. It was nice...

Stop it!

"Okay, You know how to make the circle. So go, but really, you don't have to slice your hand off again."

"Are you seriously gonna make me do this?"

"The sooner you quit fucking resisting, the sooner I'll leave you alone, seriously."

Shikamaru growled and took the razorblade Hidan was extending to him. Did he really have to do it on his hand? That crap *hurt*.

He let the blade hover above his palm, his face creased in concern, and glanced up at Hidan. He was being completely serious for the first time since Shika'd initially seen him standing there in the rain at the park, minus the intent to kill. No anger, no sneering, no sarcasm. Just calm and sincere.

Shikamaru took a quick breath and sliced his previously uninjured palm in one fluid motion. It stung a little, but it was nothing compared to the burning cut he'd given himself from the pocketknife.

"Imagine yourself in a bubble." Hidan said, and the Nara was surprised to see that his Jashinist teacher had repeated the action, and was already making his own circle on the other sheet. "Wrap yourself in the pain, focus on it and pull it tight around you like a blanket." His violet eyes were closed, but even so Shikamaru watched in intrest. He'd never seen the usually energetic, crazy Hidan look so serene and peaceful. "If you train your body to accept it, it stops hurting. It'll be awhile before you can turn it to pleasure, but numbing yourself helps."

Shikamaru tore his eyes away and started to make his own circle. Taking slow, even breaths and trying to fight his instincts of blocking out the pain. Trying to psychologically alter it into something else.

It wasn't working, it still stung. A lot.

"It ain't gonna happen the first time, so don't expect it to. You gotta practice. I'm just showing you how to do it." Shikamaru looked back at Hidan, whose eyes were open again, studying him calmly. "You should consider yourself lucky. I had to figure all this shit out on my own. Took fucking forever..."

Shikamaru finished the triangle of his symbol, and Hidan seemed pleased.

"Meditation helps if you have candles. Fire is beautiful but deadly, a perfect representation. But since we're just doing the basics here, you can skip 'em. Now, you need 5 drops for a respectable offering, anything less is unacceptable and just pisses Him off. It's really not that fucking much anyway. I mean, people give a pint of their blood at those stupid blood drives. Five drops is nothing. So don't skimp out, make 'em big."

Shikamaru watched, surprised at how unfazed he was as Hidan made a fist from his bleeding hand and held it up above his mouth. A single tear of blood slipped down his thumb and hung there for a moment as he slightly clenched and relaxed his fist over and over again. It grew to a decent size before it couldn't stand its own weight anymore plummeted down to splatter on a pink tongue.

Shikamaru was suddenly aware of how hard his heart was beating, and he returned to regulating his breathing, praying silently that Hidan wouldn't notice. There's really no way that he could, but you had to expect the unexpected and hope you get pleasantly surprised with this man.

Dammit. Was he really so desperate that he was attracted to Hidan? No, no, he couldn't even entertain the thought. He loved Neji, even if he never saw him again. And Hidan... that just didn't even make sense.

He curled and uncurled his fingers a few times. He already had a little pool in his palm. He just had to get this over with and Hidan would leave him alone.

Pushing his reluctance away, he lifted his hand up, mimicing Hidan. He clenched his eyes shut, and felt three drips hit his tongue. He worked his hand to hurry up and get two more, suddenly self-conscious of Hidan's eyes on him. Something didn't feel right, this wss getting awkward, it was a little too intimate to be sharing, especially with /him/ of all people. Even though it shouldn't be. Perhaps Hidan's demeanor was effecting him more than he realized. This was a sacred thing to the zealot, and it was making the air suffocatingly heavy.

The final two spattered in and he closed his mouth, dammit, some had gotten on his lower lip. He really didn't want to lick it off. Would it still count as five if he wiped it with his hand? Probably not, Goddamit.

"There. Hardest part's over." Hidan said, his voice strangely thick. "Now you can either pray out loud or in your head. Doesn't matter. Just ask for his blessings, thank him for anything good that happened, and tell him your body is his vessel. Anything extra you feel like throwing in there is all the better, as long as it's respectful." Hidan closed his eyes at this and rested his hands on his knees, bowing his head ever-so-slightly.

Shikamaru took a deep breath. This was really the part he'd been fearing. Surely nothing would happen if he just pretended to pray, right? He'd swallowed his own blood and ruined his sheets. Did he really have to do more?

His chest suddenly went tight, and his eyes felt like they were going to pop out of his skull. Oh shit, he... he couldn't breathe. It hurt! Damn, was this.. was it Jashin? He really had control over Shikamaru's body like this?

He tried to tell Hidan, but it felt as if there was a giant weight on his chest, it was crushing him.

Shit! *SHIT!*

He was getting dizzy, black specks danced across his vision. No, no. He couldn't be real, Shika knew he was real but not *this* real!

He was going to suffocate, he couldn't move, he couldn't breathe, he couldn't call for help. He was panicing, hot tears were slipping down his cheek against his will. He was just about fed up with this crying nonsense! In his dreams and now in reality his body wasn't doing what he told it to.

DamndamnDAMN! He couldn't do it! He couldn't be Jashin's puppet, he couldn't be a Jashinist. He wasn't cut out for it, he just couldn't!

But he had no choice. He was dieing, he was going to die right here and now by the hand of an intagible being if he didn't do what he wanted. He didn't want to die, he'd never wanted to die. He just wanted a magic fix, he wanted his old life back, back before Hidan and Kakuzu had moved in.

Okay! He thought frantically, his vision no more than a tunnel. *Okay! I'm a vessel! I'm your vessel and I want your blessing !* He screamed in his head. He couldn't keep himself upright much longer, he still couldn't breath, and now he couldn't even think straight. More tears slid over his skin, burning him like acid, god he could almost smell it! It was all in his head, he knew he wasn't crying acid tears but everything hurt so bad that he couldn't even imagine trying to reason with himself.

Thank you! Thank you for choosing me! Thank you for answering my prayers that I didn't know I made. Thank you for giving me a friend, even if it is Hidan! THANKYOUTHANKYOU NOW MAKE IT STOP!

Sweet blessed air whoosed into his lungs, and he coughed and hacked violently while trying to keep his lungs full at the same time. He coughed so hard he thought he was going to vomit.

But finally the coughs ceased and he was breathing as if he'd run a marathon. He stared wide eyed at the bloody sheet beneath him, his hands spread wide and his arms locked to keep him from falling on

his face. Breathing, in and out the wonderful, *wonderful* air flowed. Holy hell he'd never been so scared in all his life, though that couldn't have been more than twenty seconds.

He absently licked his lips, and upon tasting that last little bit of blood he remembered Hidan's presence, and slowly looked up to meet his gaze.

Hidan was absolutely still, he didn't even seem to be breathing as he stared emotionlessly back at Shikamaru. What was wrong with him? Had he done something wrong? Was he upset? Did he know Shika had tried to resist? Had this happened to him the first time he prayed?

"Wh... What?" The Nara wheezed, and Hidan suddenly moved so fast that he almost couldn't see him, yet it was slow motion at the same time.

A pale, bloodied hand reached out and lifted his chin up, his body involuntarily following until he was upright on his knees. Another hand wrapped around the back of his head and Shikamaru's mind and body both froze.

There were lips against his.

Holy shit.

They were soft and warm just like Neji's and even though he wanted to scream, even though he wanted to pull away and run for his life, he couldn't move, he didn't want to move...

A warm tongue slid across his lower lip and he reacted on instinct. It tasted so good. How could such an awful person taste so good?

His mouth opened a little more, and it was taken advantage of.

Oohh yes.. He'd missed this. He missed it so much it hurt, he hadn't realized it until now... But it's okay. It felt good, he felt good now. "/

love you, Shikamaru Nara." Neji's voice echoed in his head. He wanted to swim in the bliss, he missed touching someone, he missed the passion, he missed this feeling of being lighter than air.

Noo! A part of him screamed. This wasn't Neji. Those weren't his lips, thats not his tongue!

And then another part just told that half to shut the hell up and moaned so slightly that he barely heard it.

He.. he barely heard it. Oh God that part hadn't been in his head!

His eyes flashed open, he didn't even know they'd closed, and he ripped himself away so forcefully that he fell onto his ass.

"GET THE HELL OUT!" He heard his own voice yell, But Hidan didn't leave, he just stayed there sitting upright on his knees, staring at Shikamaru in confusion.

"You fucking psycho I said LEAVE!" the Nara roared again, his voice cracking.

Hidan stayed where he was for a moment, his eyes seemed unfocused and his brows were continuously creased. Shikamaru glared daggers at him, still panting, his body still reeling from the sudden cutoff of those wonderful things he hadn't felt in so long.

Finally, without a word, Hidan winced. He actually winced, as if he was hurting, but he moved. He moved so fast that in the millisecond it took Shikamaru to blink, Hidan was gone without a trace except for the curtains blowing in the evening wind from the open window.

Shika stared at it, and then collapsed onto the floor. He put his hands over his face, not even caring that his palm was still bleeding, and groaned.

What the holy stupid fucking hell had he gotten himself into?

Hidan hadn't been lying when he said his leg would heal faster. Everything that had happened since that day almost felt as if a dream. It was only a matter of 48 hours before he could put weight on the leg again. He wasn't instantly better, but it was a massive improvement. This rapid healing only made things seem more surreal.

After the Jashinist had left, and after a good twenty minutes when Shikamaru could finally gather himself enough to get off the floor, he went to the bathroom and stared at his reflection for he didn't even know how long. There was a large smear of his own blood on his right cheek, and some on his chin. After realizing that that portion of it wasn't his, he scrubbed his face vigorously until he thought he might start bleeding all over again.

He glared at his reflection again, almost scared of his own expression. He looked like he could kill someone, he was so pissed. There was no way this could be happening, his karma couldn't possibly be that bad. He had just been in a battle for his life against this man and now all the sudden he was kissing him. What the hell was going on here? Was he trapped in a nightmare? Maybe it was some sort of Genjutsu.

The only thing he could think that logically explained this situation is that it just *wasn't real*.

And now he sat at a local diner, drumming his fingers on the table as he waited for the young brunette waitress. She was doing her damndest to flirt with him, but he wasn't in the mood to humor her. He just wanted something smothered in grease to get rid of this hangover.

Yes, he'd resorted to drinking himself into a stupor last night, after thinking thoroughly about the situation. He was at a breaking point now, he literally didn't know what to do. He didn't have the slightest idea. He'd not even been this hopeless after Neji left.

He'd buried his head in his hands and let a tear or two slip freely out, he was so confused and frustrated. He wanted to break something, he wanted to go charging after that idiot albino and beat him to a pulp. He didn't even give a damn about breaking his word, he wanted to kill him so he could put this whole stupid mess behind him and go begging and pleading back to Neji like he should have done in the first damn place.

But he couldn't do it. He wasn't exactly positive why.

Actually, that was a lie. He knew why, he knew exactly why. He just didn't want to admit it, not even to himself, *especially* not to himself. He would repeat it a million times out loud if he needed to. He was *not* going to let this happen. He did not have feelings for that horrible evil man. But he still kept feeling that little tugging sensation when Hidan's expression snuck its way into his mind.

He'd been confused, hadn't even attempted to hide it. He didn't even seem offended when Shikamaru shoved himself away, just confused. It was like he didn't know what was happening either, like he'd been trying to process everything just as Shikamaru was right now. Shikamaru had acted instantly, using his anger to turn him into confusion. He'd stopped it, he'd stopped it because it wasn't right. It was weird enough that they were suddenly acting like best pals after trying to murder each other just days ago. But Hidan kissing him, that had been a step too far.

But... Hidan didn't do things without reason right?

Even though Shikamaru had decided that underneath the facade the immortal man was just as human as anyone else. And every human had been known to make stupid impulsive decisions driven by sudden surges of emotion. And they had been doing something very deep and intimate. Hidan was sharing with him the single most important thing in his life, Shikamaru had had that weird 'spiritual' experience, and maybe seeing Shikamaru submissive like that had done something to the albino.

That meant Hidan was attracted to him. He hadn't kissed him as a joke, he wasn't just being stupid, weird, inappropriate Hidan.

The king of the psychos *liked him*.

No no no, that couldn't happen. It was impossible, it was unrealistic. Hidan was a psychopath, he was with Kakuzu, who as also insane but in a different, far more subtle way, mainly for the fact that he was with Hidan.

Hidan hated Shikamaru, and he hated Hidan. Hidan ruined his life. He drove away the love of his life, then had the fucking audacity to make a move on him?

"Here ya are sir. Enjoy your dinner and just gimme a whistle if ya need anythin' else." The brunette waitress said, setting down a hamburger so juicy that the bun was already soggy. She smiled seductively and turned on her heel to leave, flipping her hair and strutting like she wasn't 30 lbs too heavy for her short stature.

She's trying just a little too hard, he thought as he absently placed a french fry in his mouth. *She was just coming off slutty*. He usually would be entertained by the fact that he was acting like Neji. He would always make little comments like that about people when they went out to eat. It was bitchy of him, but his lovers little quirks like that had always amused him.

The little bell of the diner dinged as someone else came in, Shikamaru only halfway paid attention as he readied himself to eat his sloppy, greasy burger, but a familiar voice caught his attention.

"Just cut the crap and give me a beer. You're not my type."

Shikamaru's eyes narrowed as he stared at the artery-clogging meal in his hands. What a coincidence, he'd been wanting an outlet for his anger.

Thank you Jashin .

Wait, what? No, don't thank him. It's strickly coincidence, nothing more. It was about time something went his way, he was due, that was all. This had nothing to do with Jashin.

He looked up, dropping his burger with a disgusting splat. Good thing he had a distraction, he wanted something greasy, but not poison.

The newcomer seemed to look up at the exactly same time, and the world stopped spinning for just a second as their gaze met. Shika watched with an amused grin as dark eyes widened upon realizing who he was, and the two were locked in a staring contest.

If he blinked... As soon as he blinked, Shikamaru would be on him. He had unfinished business. He really hadn't held a grudge against the man in front of him, he'd just been a pawn after all. But Shika could sure as hell channel all his anger and frustration that had been building up in him into those little lingering negative feelings. He just wanted an outlet, it's not as if he was going to beat him up, but if anyone could give him a damn good challenge, it was this guy.

Sasuke Uchiha.

Shikamaru was the first to blink, to his great satisfaction. And in that fraction of a second Sasuke took off, pushing over the table and shoving the chair far back in his effort.

Shikamaru was after him in a flash, after shouting some incomprehensible warning.

Nope, *this was gonna happen* .

It entertained the living hell out of him that Sasuke was running at all. So much so that he heard himself laugh out loud, though he cringed inside from the slightly mindless sound of it. But just attributed it to the hurricane of negative emotions swirling around in him, looking for a way out.

They were outside, shoving and twisting and evading their way through throngs of passer-bys. They all voiced complaints but Shikamaru paid no mind, his eyes were locked onto Sasuke. He was going to catch up to him, as soon as they got out of this crowd. As soon as Sasuke made a mistake and cornered himself, it was done. Anticipation rose in him, making him sprint ahead faster.

He was stronger now, even Hidan hadn't been able to beat him. Sasuke had fought the Jashinist AND Itachi and escaped relatively unscathed. It would be a fight to be remembered if he could corner him in a thinly populated area.

Of course, they were downtown.. there *were* no thinly populated areas near here. So worst case scenario, he might get himself arrested. Though he was absolutely positive that Sasuke didn't have a clean record and he could just claim he recognized him from the 'outstanding warrant' file collection.

After all, the younger Uchiha was like a hitman. Maybe he didn't outright kill people, but he beat them within an inch of their life. All just for a little cash.

Heathen.

Dammit brain, shut the hell up!

Sasuke took a sharp left and Shikamaru almost ran right into the fence that blocked off the alley as he followed. Growling, he focused chakra in his hand, making it glow that purple-black and imaging his hand as a blade, making it as thin and sharp as he could manage.

Without stopping he slashed a quick X in the chain-link and it gave way easily, giving him just enough room to dive through and roll back to his feet without losing any speed. How Sasuke had seemed to just run right through it baffled him. But the Uchiha were nothing if not clever.

He was also confused as to how he'd done what he just did. He hadn't ever been able to make a weapon from his bare hand before, at least not in that way. How had he known how to do that? How did it come so easily?

He was struck violently from his thoughts as a foot flew out from behind a dumpster. He could only gasp before he crashed into the brick wall behind him.

Make a bubble around you. Take the the pain and wrap yourself in it like a blanket. Embrace it, and it won't hurt.

He forced air into his lungs and pushed from the wall, exchanging blows and kicks and glares with his target. He didn't even have time to think as Sasuke struck over and over again, the only hint of emotion on him was the slightest crinkle on his forehead. Shikamaru kept blocking and attacking purely on instinct. He watched and relished in sudden overwhelming excitement as his body nearly moved on its own. He was so fast! He was so strong! He'd just been thrown into the side of a building and it wasn't affecting him at all.

A sneer stretched across his face as he blocked two of Sasuke's swings with one arm, and grunted with the effort of drawing back his free one and slamming a shadow-hazed fist into the younger Uchiha's gut. His opponent's Sharingan flashed on just before he was struck and sent barreling backward down the alley. After a few tumbles Sasuke managed to get his feet under him and skidded to a stop.

"Why the hell are you chasing me!?" He barked.

Shikamaru laughed, making his skin crawl. That didn't sound like his usual laugh, what the hell was he doing? Part of him was scared and the other part was about to have an inner orgasm from the rush of adrenaline overtaking him. He felt so untouchable! Even if Sasuke hurt him it wouldn't matter! He was unbeatable, nothing could stop him.

"Why the hell are you running?" The Nara replied, at least his voice sounded mostly normal.

Mostly.

Sasuke pulled a switchblade out of his pocket, seemingly unarmed with the katana he'd had last time they met. But it didn't make a difference, a blade made entirely of electricity shot out like a lightsaber, it seemed all he needed was something to channel his chakra into to make that same weapon. He charged forward, red-eyes blazing. Without even thinking about it Shikamaru side-stepped the Uchiha's blade and grabbed him by the back of his shirt, putting his first two fingers to his lips and muttering his jutsu invocation. Sasuke whirled with his blade, slicing all the shadow tentacles that shot toward him with amazing speed and accuracy. He leaped upward with chakra enhanced strength and flipped and twisted his body to land on the roof, shooting a death-glare at Shikamaru before turning to flee once again.

Not missing a beat, Shikamaru launched himself at the sides of the building, jumping back and forth across in a zig-zag until his feet landed on the roof, and then he was off.

Sasuke was just making a leap down to a one-story building when Shikamaru caught up with him, tackling him in midair. The two managed to free themselves from each other and land on their feet, but Sasuke was rigid, his entire body vibrating but not quite convulsing as Hidan's had when hit with the same attack.

"You motherfucker." Sasuke growled through clenched teeth, his eyes looking they were going to explode from their sockets.

"I've been practicing." Shikamaru said, grinning darkly and cutting off the channel of chakra to his hand. It hadn't been the move that had rotted out an entire half of Hidan's torso, but it had the same effect on the brain.

"Leave me alone, I didn't do anything to you." Sasuke said, regaining his composure as the aftereffects of the jutsu slowly wore off.

"Then why did you split like that?"

Sasuke was silent, his eyes flicking around as if he were going to try to run again. Shikamaru just smiled more.

"Are you afraid of me?"

"You're not Shikamaru Nara."

"Excuse me?" He said, a brow raising. "I most certainly am."

Are you?

His grin vanished and his chest suddenly felt heavy. The adrenaline and that strange powerful feeling vanished and his body was suddenly a million pounds. The distant feeling faded, and he looked down at his hands in shock at the abrupt change.

They were normal, the same hands he always looked at. But.. what the hell? He knew where he was, he knew what happened, and when he looked back up at Sasuke calmly studying him, he wondered why he'd been so adamant to fight him, why had he been so angry? He almost felt like he'd just been watching himself ever since their eyes had met at the diner.

"What.. what's going on?" He said, looking at Sasuke with pleading eyes as if he had any fucking idea either.

The younger Uchiha only stared at him, something akin to confused pity in his eyes, before turning and leaping off the roof.

Oh no, he wasn't getting away! Shikamaru still had some shit to say to him, and some questions to ask. What the hell was he doing in the city? For one. He better not be after Neji too. Though he couldn't imagine why he would be.

He pushed aside his utter confusion and rocketed after him. He'd leaped off the roof and was just about to hit the ground when a black blur slammed into his shoulder and threw him off balance. He managed to recover instead of smashing his skull on the concrete, and did a few backward flips to distance himself. That hadn't been Sasuke, He had watched his opponent vanish around the corner.

"Please refrain from pursueing my little brother." A voice said from the shadows that were far too dark and long for this time of day.

Little brother? Wait, he knew that voice.

Oh for fuck's sake... *You've got to be kidding me right now.*

None other than Itachi Uchiha stepped forward, still stoic and elegant as he'd been two years ago. He regarded Shikamaru with features absolutley unreadable. He nodded to him though, acknowledging that he remembered who he was.

"It's nice to see you've improved, Nara." He said, with doupt in his voice. As if he wasn't happy about it at all.

"What the hell are you doing here? Did *everyone* fucking follow me here? You're not trying to kill me too are you?" Shikamaru replied drearily, relaxing his stance. He didn't think Itachi would attack him unless he showed hostility. And he had no quarrels with the elder brother. He owed him, if anything, for helping to save Neji's life.

"I see you've adopted Hidan's speech patterns. It wouldn't have suited you before, but you've changed, haven't you?" Itachi said thoughtfully, looking at him like some sort of science experiment. "What did you do to yourself?"

Shikamaru paused, unsure what to think or how to respond to this. What *did* he do to himself? What the hell had just happened to him? Just because he got a little angry he had suddenly rationalized it as okay to just attack Sasuke for no freaking reason. Even if he hadn't technically thrown the first punch.. Or kick. Whatever.

"Why are you challenging Sasuke?" Itachi asked. And again Shikamaru didn't know how to respond. Why? Because he was pissed at himself and Hidan and his life and he needed a punching bag and Jashin had provided him with Sasuke.

DAMMIT! No, Sasuke had just coincidentally come to get a beer at the same time Shikamaru was there. Just at the wrong place at the wrong time. No Jashin, just circumstance.

"I... I wanted to make sure he wasn't still beating people up for money. " He lied, and Itachi's eyes narrowed as if he were as easy to see through as a window. "I just wanted to talk to him but as soon as he saw me he made a run for it." That much was the truth, well mostly. He didn't want to just chat, he wanted to hurt him.

God, what the hell came over him? It was so unlike himself. Was he really so stressed that he'd act so far out of character? Sasuke hadn't even thought he was himself. That's probably why he'd made a break for it in the first place. He'd been acting so strangely that someone who hardly knew him at all could tell something was up just by looking at him.

"I wanted to know why-"

"I'm not a fool. Don't insult me with your lies." Itachi interrupted in monotone, stepping forward to get a closer look, Shikamaru assumed. He looked the Nara up and down with black eyes, and blinked slowly. "I assume you have questions for me, don't you? I have to attend to Sasuke, he's getting better at sneaking away from me, but he always gets into trouble. So hurry and ask."

Questions? Why would he have questions? Itachi was the only person he *wasn't* confused about. So apparently he decided to abandon the Akatsuki and try to bring Sasuke to the good side of the law. Or that's what the Nara was assuming after piecing together everything he'd said and done so far. It was a noble decision, and Shikamaru had no quarrels with it.

"Why are you two here?" He asked out of sheer curiosity.

Itachi's brows twitched up slightly. And Shikamaru wondered what he had expected him to ask about, seeing as that had not been it. He apparently knew something that he thought Shikamaru did too.

"We were sent to check up on someone." Itachi said almost cautiously, not breaking eye contact.

Check up on someone...

Itachi looked at him expectantly. Shikamaru just stared back like an idiot, what the hell was he trying to say? Checking up on someone, hwo the hell was that supposed to be a hint? He didn't know anyone that Itachi did. Unless it was someone in the Akatsuki...

Then it hit him.

"Hidan." Shikamaru whispered in disbelief. Itachi knew he was alive. He had to. And.. Holy shit... they'd been sent here to make sure he wasn't killing people again.

Itachi gave a ghost of a nod, and closed his eyes. "Where do you live?"

"Why?" Shikamaru said, angry now. Now, *now* he had questions. If he weren't so furious, he'd probably ask them. But at the moment all he could do was stand there and glare at the eldest Uchiha, shaking in fury. He'd thought of Itachi as an accomplice. He'd sort of maybe even considered him a friend. But Hidan had been back from the dead for God knows how long, and he hadn't thought to send some sort of warning. Surely he could have tracked him down easily enough, Hidan did, and it's not as if he covered his tracks that well. He hadn't known he fucking needed to!

"I did not realize that you took up residence in this city. It changes many aspects of my mission. You want information but I'm preoccupied right now. If you would like to talk then I'll need to

contact you. Where do you live?" He asked again, more impatient now.

Shikamaru stared for a few heartbeats before sighing and reluctantly giving him his address. He desperately wanted some answers, and here was someone willing to give them to him. But he really didn't need Itachi popping in randomly, he already had Hidan doing that.

Well... not since *the thing* happened. But he was almost positive he would come back, and even though he was dreading it, a very small part of him hoped he would return soon. He immediately tried to squash that part of him, but the feeling persisted, so he resorted to just ignoring it.

He reasoned with himself that if Itachi was here to 'check up' on Hidan, he probably wouldn't be dumb enough to let the albino know he was here. He would be subtle, and this fact calmed Shika's nerves a bit. But only a bit.

He yelped then as Itachi burst into a flock of crows. Damn, he'd forgotten the man's tendency to do that.

Another thing he'd forgotten among all the chaos was his car. He'd driven it here when he'd realized that Hidan hadn't rigged it. And now he had to trek back the 3 blocks he'd put between it chasing Sasuke. And to top it all off, the pain he hadn't felt while battling the youngest Uchiha was now catching up to him in near debilitating waves now that his adrenaline rush had ceased.

"Such a drag.." He moaned, shoving his hands in his pockets and limping forward.

A/N-

WHOO! So to recap!

Neji leaves Shika. Shika gets depressed. Shika accidentally devotes himself to God of slaughter, death, and destruction. Hidan is back from the dead. He's Shika's slave. Shika learns how to give offerings to Jashin.

Hidan kisses Shika. All the fangirls squeal.

Then Sasuke pops in, Shika gets pissed randomly and tries to kill him. Itachi appears and says 'Fuck no!' And Shikamaru is depressed again.

How's that for fast paced?

Aaanywayyy...

...

I am so... fucking... tired right now.

So, I don't know if it makes sense. I'm still really inspired to write but I literally can't even focus. But, yaaay, I've successfully uploaded a chapter every day for 5 days.

I'm gonna go temporarily die now. I hear that's pretty relaxing.

Reeviiiewww and stuff.

Unwilling affections

Recurring Nightmares

A/N- Ohai! Yes, I'm still alive. Sorry it took so long, but there were complications. However, I hope you'll all be pleasantly surprised. I've never done this in any of my stories, and I want to state right away that because I am such a terrible prude, all credit for the last scene of this chapter goes to Fluffyisemo. Also, When you get to this scene, you need to go listen to a song while reading it. It's called 'Closer' by Nine Inch Nails. :) It so perfectly fitting.

Now, without further adeiu! Chapter.. uh.. 6 I think.

He was surrounded by darkness. But not only that, that didn't bother him so much. No, that wasn't it at all.

It wasn't just the dark, it was *empty* dark. He knew without seeing that if he were to get up and walk around he would run into nothing. His steps would echo as if in a tunnel but no matter which way he turned he would find no wall.

There was absolutly nothing, he was in here completly and totally alone. Unable to see, unable to leave.

He hugged his knees to his chest, it was crushing him, the emptiness. He focused on his breathing to distract him from the overwhelming loneliness, but found that he hadn't been breathing in the first place. He hadn't the need to breathe.

Was that strange? He thought maybe this should be unusual to him but instead it brought him releif. If he was in this unending darkness, and he didn't need air to live...

He must be dead.

That didn't worry him either. Shouldn't he be concerned if he was dead? That was a bad thing wasn't it? But he didn't mind, he was calm, listening for a heartbeat that wasn't there to hear.

He hid his face between his knees. He didn't want to look anymore, at least with his eyes closed he could pretend he was somewhere else.

But the silence, it was deafening. It was as bad as the perverse amount of nothing that surrounded him.

Someone, anyone, get him out. He didn't know how he got here but he knew without a doubt that if he stayed here he would surely lose his mind.

"Shikamaru."

His head shot up from his knees and he squinted into the darkness. His heart would be racing if he wasn't dead.

Had he really heard that? Was someone here? Or was that his imagination? He held perfectly still, and the silence beat at his eardrums and the darkness clawed at his eyes but he listened and watched with everything he had.

He couldn't have imagined it, it had to be real. But the silence stretched on and finally he let his head back down. He should have known, there was no hope. It was always an illusion, whenever he felt hope it was just a way for whatever omnipotent being was out there to tear him down more than he already was.

"I tried so hard Neji." He whispered into his knees. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry I still couldn't save you..." He waited, he didn't know why, there was only him. Hope, stupid useless hope. He kept letting it trick him, thinking things were getting better, thinking he felt better, that maybe he'd keep feeling better. But he always fell back down.

"We're the same now. We are broken. I broke you, and you broke me." He wanted to cry, he was alone anyway, why shouldn't he?

Because he couldn't. His chest burned and ached with the need to just cry and keep crying until the end of time.

"Now we are broken and alone with our nightmares. Both of us. That must be what you wanted.. I hope you're having more luck than I am."

"Shikamaru..."

Again his head shot up. He knew he heard it that time. Someone was here, it was just an echoed whisper but someone was here.

"Hello?" He called out, his voice reminding him of a scared little kid.

There was no answer, but he knew he had heard it, he knew he was not alone. Someone was watching him, trying to get him to notice their presence.

He paused, that had happened before. He had thought he was alone but he hadn't been. Who was it that had done that? It was someone important, someone who made him happy.

"Shikamaru Nara."

He jumped at the suddenly loud voice. He did not recognize it, as he so often did in these sorts of circumstances. It was a mans, so deep that it almost rattled his bones when it spoke.

"You wish for help?" It said, and he could do nothing but nod.

"I can help you."

"Then do it! Help me!" Shikamaru said, scrambling to his feet. He had the feeling no one was here with him, it was just a disembodied voice. But it did not matter, it pushed the emptiness back to where he was no longer being consumed by it. And it broke the silence. He did

not care who it was, or what they wanted in return. He just wanted it to go away. He wanted to stop feeling like a peice of himself was missing. He wanted to feel normal again, he did not want to be dead.

"You must stop resisting, and I will help you."

What was he resisting? He wasn't resisting anything right now, there was nothing *to* resist. It did not matter, he would do anything to make it better. He just wanted to be better.

"I will help you, and when I command it, you will help me. You will be mine, and you will serve me as such."

Shikamaru hesitated. He didn't want to become a slave here. He had no problem returning a favor, but /belonging/ to someone? He was still a person, he may be dead but he was not property to be owned.

"Who are you?" He asked meekly. He wanted the help, he wanted it so badly that he couldn't stand it. But...

But what? He asked for someone to save him. Life does not present solutions, it presents oppurtunity. Temptation and oppurtunity were commonly mistaken, but this was not temptation. Or was it?

"I am your savior." The deep voice said. "This is my gift to you."

Arms suddenly wrapped around him from behind. Shikamaru instantly slumped into the embrace, wanting to cry again but from releif this time. He put his own arms over the ones holding him and squeezed, it felt good. All the nothingness that had been driving him mad shrank back with this simple act, like demons crawling around in the shadows at the edge of light. This was all he'd wanted. Comfort, company, /care/. He did not want to be alone, he did not want to stop feeling. Not anymore, he was done with it. Especially now, now that he had... had...

Who was this?

He slid his hands along the strangers arms. They certainly were not Neji's. Neji's arms were not this muscular, he wasn't weak but he was far more feminine than this.

He looked down but could not see, he was still in the dark. But that was fine. As long as he had someone here with him.

But who was it? He had to know.

He twisted around, and the stranger let him, replacing their arms around his waist as he faced their chest.

It was just as muscular as the arms, and Shikamaru felt a small zap of excitement. His 'Savior' was a gracious person, apparently.

"Who are you?" Shikamaru whispered, and the only reply he received was a another whisper.

"Wake up."

Shikamaru's eyes opened slowly, and he blinked a few times before realization hit him.

He was awake? He'd been sleeping?

He was in his bed, it must be true. He remembered going to bed last night but not falling asleep. His mind had been racing so fast with everything that had happened that he had almost been ready to just go watch T.V.

And that hadn't felt like his usual dreams, or his usual nightmares at least. It started the same, but instead of getting warped and malicious and heart-wrenching it actually got better.

It was nice, not waking up in a panic. And he felt good, even when he didn't have nightmares he still rarely woke up in a good mood.

He was sad at the same time though, that it was over. His first good dream in half a year and it ended just when it was getting good. It

was a content sort of sadness though. He could work with that, he could be happy.

He hopped out of bed and was about to head to the bathroom to start his daily morning routine when, for no reason he really could understand or even care enough to, he quickly whirled around, opened his window, and leaned out to see how the clouds were today.

It was raining, not a downpour, not really even rain. It was more like a mist, no, more than that. A drizzle. Either way it was peaceful in a somber type of way. The air smelled wonderful at the least.

Now he finally turned and made his way to the bathroom. His body felt good as new, no aches or pains at all. And he thought maybe a good workout was in order to boost his spirits even more.

But that would be decided later, for now, shower, shave, and breakfast. He still had two more days before they were expecting him back at work. So he needed to force as much enjoyment as he could in there.

He had just sat down in his recliner and lit up a cigarette when, once again, he was nearly victim to a heart attack.

"Good Morning Shikamaru." Itachi's voice said, shattering the silence.

After recovering from the scare, the Nara's eyes flicked over to the livingroom window that Hidan usually used as his doorway. Itachi was perched there, somehow still looking refined even in such a position.

What the hell was up with these Akatsuki people and not using the damn door?

"Eh, morning."

"May I come in?" The Uchiha asked plainly, and Shika almost laughed. He was pretty well already inside, hopefully he hadn't just been sitting there waiting on him to come in and sit down.

"Yeah sure. You know you could just knock on the door like a normal person."

Itachi ignored this and stepped inside, his eyes scanning the room before he stopped in his tracks. Shikamaru followed his gaze and his mood plummeted for just a moment when he realized he'd forgotten to dispose of the bloodied sheets. He'd just kicked them into a bundle in the corner after that fiasco had gone down, not wanting to deal with it at the time. Then he'd gotten drunk, and then he'd just forgotten about them.

Itachi sighed heavily. "I thought as much."

Shikamaru jerked forward, blushing. "That's not what you think it is!" He said, hoping desperately that Itachi did not actually know what had happened and was just trying to play mind games.

Itachi just stared at him, one brow raised in interest. "You haven't been practicing Jashinism then?"

... Oh yeah.

He'd forgotten about Itachi's unexplained extensive knowledge of the religion. When Shikamaru had confronted it before he'd just dismissed it as being crucial information related to being Hidan's acquaintance. It was a good enough reason, he supposed, but not a satisfying one.

"Uh... " He replied dumbly. Had he just given himself away? Oh please please Jashin don't let him have given himself away.

Dammit! Not Jashin!

Itachi blinked and turned back to the sheets, studying them as if unwilling to go any closer. "I can't seem to predict what that idiot is going to do no matter what I try." He muttered quietly. Shikamaru wasn't sure if he was talking to him or to himself. "How did he manage to trick you into it?" The Uchiha said, not turning to look.

Shikamaru chuckled nervously and scratched the back of his head. "Well. Erm... I kind of did it to myself, in a way." Why did he say that? Hidan had admitted to manipulating him with the tire shennanigan... But still, it wasn't as if he forced him too.

Now his visitor turned to look, disbelief just the slightest bit evident on his features.

"It's... it's a long story..." Shikamaru admitted, slouching.

"Shorten it." Itachi ordered, as if it were the easiest thing in the world.

"Why is this important?"

"It's important because you have once again gotten yourself into something that's not what you think it to be. I'm helping you only because had it not been for you and your boyfriend two years ago I would never have known what Sasuke was doing without my knowledge."

Shikamaru made a face. "Ex-boyfriend." He corrected, leaning back into his chair.

Itachi stared, waiting for him to explain. He sighed, might as well, seeing as it was a pretty important part.

"We.. *broke up* six months ago. I have no idea where Neji went. He only left a note saying that... that he couldn't stay with me. because I was a constant reminder of what happened to him."

Itachi nodded, sympathetic sadness flicking across his features.

"Neji Hyuga went through quite a bit of trauma." He said quietly, only

reinstating a fact Shikamaru was already well-aware of. He supposed it was the Uchiha's attempt at consolation. But it didn't help.

He just nodded and continued, knowing what his visitor really wanted to hear. "A little over a week ago someone stole a tire off my car. I didn't think anything of it since it'd been happening frequently. Those are the perils of living here." He shrugged, ignoring Itachi's accusing eyes. He didn't freaking know he was supposed to be suspicious!

"Anyway, the next morning someone had put my tire back on my car, and I noticed a little tiny Jashin symbol on the inside rim. It was in blood but the lab couldn't identify who's it was. Obviously at this point I realized someone was screwing with me. So long story short, I was trying to draw them out by pretending to join their religion." He paused to take a slow, deep breath. "Apparently that had been the plan all along. Hidan showed himself, and after nearly shitting myself, we fought, I beat him, and to keep him from going after Neji, I made him swear his loyalty to me."

"Why didn't you kill him?"

It was Shikamaru's turn to stare at the man like he was stupid. "Uh, well I did that before. Remember? Didn't work. I figured this way he'd be under my control and I could just keep him from making the sacrifices he needs to stay alive. And then the problem would solve itself."

"And what about those." Itachi motioned to the sheets. Shikamaru hesitated. Would he know if he was telling the whole story? Should he just tell him? Maybe the sharingan user could shed more light on the subject. He knew Hidan better than Shikamaru, that was for sure.

He... he couldn't though. It was hard enough trying to believe it himself. He didn't think Itachi would understand. You had to be there. Shikamaru had participated and even he didn't completely get it.

"I was pretty badly injured during our fight." He thought briefly of telling Itachi about the infection he'd gotten and Hidan taking care of him, but honestly that part seemed irrelevant. "He convinced me that praying would help me heal faster. I... I didn't think anything would actually come of it."

Itachi gave an irritated sigh and pinched the bridge of his nose. "Your ignorance is a persisting thorn in my side Shikamaru Nara."

Shikamaru couldn't even be insulted, he was right, he'd been so stupid. But even Itachi had just stated moments ago that Hidan was impossible to figure out. How the hell was he supposed to stop screwing up? No matter what he did, it was the wrong decision.

"Where is he now?" Itachi demanded, interrupting his thoughts. And Shikamaru tried his hardest not to let his alarm show. He was going to have to explain what happened. Shit, he couldn't do that. *He just couldn't*

"I don't know. I was more or less attacked by... by Jashin... I guess, during the ceremony. When it was over I told him to get the hell out. I haven't seen him since." *Mostly the truth*, he reassured himself. *I didn't lie, just left one little detail out.*

"Well, you look to be in perfect health. I'm taking it your prayers did not go unheard. Regardless, I need to find Hidan. We need to have a chat."

"How did he escape?" Shikamaru asked quickly when Itachi started stepping toward the window. The elder Uchiha hesitated, and turned back to him. "It's a long story." He said softly, quoting Shikamaru.

The Nara considered this. Itachi was obviously in a hurry, he wasn't going to explain everything. He had to be very precise about the questions he asked.

"Hidan said he had been stalking me for four months. He told me he didn't just attack me right away because he was after Neji. But that

doesn't really explain anything. He has been acting... different... than I remember.."

Itachi was patiently waiting for an actual question to be asked, though he was listening intently to the information Shika kept dishing out.

"I guess what I want to know is, why? Why didn't he just kill me in my sleep? Why does he want me to convert? And why did he wait so long? Did he just get out of the ground recently or what?"

Itachi looked almost sullen at this. "I think we all wish to know why Hidan does the things he does."

Shikamaru slouched, it was useless. If Itachi couldn't clear things up, he was damned.

"But... maybe it makes sense, if you're open to thinking of Hidan as a person underneath all his insanity." Itachi added quietly, his gaze steady on the floor.

"I suppose you deserve an exanation for what you've been through because of him. I won't make excuses, but this is what I know... Kakuzu... has gone missing." His voice was laced with uncertainty at the last. "Nagato has not been able to make contact with him. He's been missing for about a year. We have all pretty well accepted him as dead. Kakuzu is not a man to be taken hostage in any situation."

Shikamaru's eyes narrowed as Itachi finally looked up at him. Hidan hadn't wanted to talk about Kakuzu because he was dead? But, if Kakuzu was dead...

"Hidan went on a rampage. We've had to track him down twice now. These last few months have been quiet. Too quiet for our liking. And so I'm here to make sure he's minding himself. This is his last chance for freedom before Nagato gets himself involved. Hidan will not live through what he is planning, immortal or not."

Itachi went silent in thought. And Shikamaru, for the hundredth time, did not know how to respond to this information. It *did* make sense, Hidan had probably sought Shikamaru and Neji out to kill them, a safe way for him to work out some anger seeing as he had a personal vendetta against them. But when he found Shikamaru, alone and miserable and broken... Maybe he'd stuck around because... because he understood.

Oh God, Hidan knew what empathy was. He really was a person, instead of a mindless killing machine.

But maybe that explained why he kept giving Shikamaru crap for being depressed. At least Neji wasn't dead...

He suddenly felt like a complete ass, even though he'd really done nothing wrong. How could he have possibly known Hidan was hurting like that?

He... he was lonely too. That's why he stuck around.

But there was one more thing that he wanted to ask about. He already had an idea, but he wanted to be sure.

"Kakuzu got him out, didn't he?"

Itachi looked at him, and it almost seemed like he wanted to say more. But he only nodded.

Shikamaru repeated the gesture. Of course he had. He'd noticed that Kakuzu didn't seem the least bit concerned at the funeral, though he never would have assumed that to be the reason why. It was stupid that he didn't think of it, but really, how could he have known?

"They've been doing this for awhile, huh?" Shikamaru asked somberly.

Again Itachi nodded.

Kakuzu was Hidan's knight, come to rescue him every time he screwed up and got himself killed. But now, if he messed up, he was done.

He was scared, hurt, confused, and looking for somewhere to turn. And Jashin... oh lord... Jashin had answered. He'd tricked Shikamaru into it. Even into spareing his life, he didn't stop himself from killing Hidan because he was afraid he'd come back, he'd thought that doing so would be playing right into the Demon God's hand. But he'd done it anyway by doing the opposite.

Hidan had only agreed to Shikamaru's terms because he knew there would be no one to rescue him this time.

DAMMIT! He didn't know whether to be mad or sympathetic... or even happy.

"I need to be going now, if you need me again use this." Itachi removed a ring from his pocket and extended it to Shikamaru. Just channel chakra unto it and use it like a microphone."

With one fluid movement Itachi was out the window and gone. And Shikamaru found himself wondering why Itachi was going to all the trouble of helping him out, even if all he did was answer some questions. He stared at the ring in his palm.

Yes, he'd said that Shikamaru helped him with Sasuke, But he would think they'd be even after Itachi helped him save Neji. He shrugged and stuffed the ring into his pocket.

There was still something more here that he was missing out on.

Troublesome.

He gave the empty room a loud, dramatic sigh that turned into a growl halfway through. Jashin forbid anything ever be simple.

"Agh! Stop saying Jashin!" He cried aloud, grabbing his head with both hands, but he froze when he saw the sheets bundled in the corner.

He needed to talk to Hidan, the air needed cleared, and without any way of finding him, Jashin was the only answer.

It was exactly what the God wanted, he realized now. But... it had to be done. He had to pray, he needed to meditate, and ask him to bring Hidan back. And then maybe, maybe go buy him a cell phone.

Itachi too.

He pushed himself from the chair, he had to do it before he changed his mind. It had to be done, he repeated to himself. He didn't feel anything for Hidan, he didn't just want to see him. He just had to... to talk to him. Clear the air.

Yes, that was all.

That was *all*.

But there was no way in hell he was using those disgusting, bloodcaked sheets. Reusing a circle made perfect sense in theory, but it was gross.

So, he had to ruin another one, Damn, Hidan had better replace them like he promised. And Shikamaru obviously needed to get some kind of rug/tarp or something if this was going to continue happening.

He ripped a sheet from the hall closet and shook it out until it layed flat. This one looked kind of thin, hopefully nothing would soak through. If so, he guessed he wasn't getting his deposit back...

Unfortunately for him he realized he didn't have a convenient little razorblade with which to perform the initial cut. That meant he had to

use a knife, seeing as he really didn't have anything sharper in the house, except maybe scissors.

He shuddered, fuck, he felt like a drug addict, except he was addicted to cutting himself open.

Well, a knife would work. Geez, some of the shit he put himself through because of that lunatic...

After getting himself a knife and then scouring his apartment for some candles as an afterthought, he sat down. They were his emergency power outage candles, but they had these nifty things called flashlights now.

He stared blankly for a few moments at the candle. Every other religious ritual that involved candles had them positioned at the 5 points on whatever diagram within a circle they used. Shikamaru had 6, so he lit up three and set them around him just outside his reach, and saved the other three to put around the circle. He swore again when he remembered to get up and shut off the lights, and once again sat crosslegged on the sheet.

He took a deep breath as he grabbed the knife, and then another as he pressed it to his now perfectly healed palm.

Accept the pain, embrace the pain, trick your mind into thinking it's good.

He could deal with pain, but if it could be avoided then he'd very much like to do so. He was nervous, very much so. He didn't want another episode like last time, if he died, there would be no one to find him until someone complained of the stench from his dead body.

It's all in your head./ He consoled. /You can do it. Stop thinking about it so hard, that's what got you into this whole stupid mess.

He slowly let his breath out as he parted the flesh of his hand for the third damn time, focusing on that instead of the stinging. Hidan was

right, it was going to take awhile to do this, not that he planned on doing it more.

"Fuuck." He hissed, tossing the weapon away and massaging his hand to build up the bloodflow.

Okay, it's done, focus, focus, focus.

He made his circle, and put the triangle in the middle, he paused long enough to set up three candles on the points where the two shapes connected and light them, and took a deep breath.

He worked his wrist and flexed his fingers, trying to hurry up and get five drops worth of blood pooled in his hand. If he didn't hurry the hell up he was going to talk himself out of it.

Again he inhaled, and as if he were taking a shot of alcohol, tipped his head back and poured the blood into his mouth. That was quite a bit more than five drops, he thought as he grimaced through a swallow.

Gross.

He put his fingertips together and started counting in his head. Breathe in, count to 4. Breathe out, count to 5.

Alright Jashin, you have my attention. He tried desperately to keep all the other thoughts from his head, he closed his eyes and felt his face harden in concentration.

Clear your mind, meditation requires the separation from earthly things, or... something like that.

He wanted Hidan to come back right? So think about that, Hidan sitting in his livingroom eating pizza, Hidan laughing after teasing Shikamaru about something, his childlike interest in little things most people take for granted.

Hidan in a t-shirt and jeans, Hidan in the rain in his trenchcoat and bare, wet chest...

Wait, no... stop. Don't think about him *like that*.

Hidan pouting because Shikamaru refused to smoke with him, Hidan grinning crookedly, how his eyes always had mischief in them, calling him pineapple head, looking at him like he wanted to grab Shikamaru and..

His eyes flashed open. Dammit, this was having the opposite effect he wanted it to.

Damn himself, and his stupid lustful emotions. Damn Neji for making him so lonely and neglected. Damn Hidan for showing back up in his life and confusing him like this. And damn Jashin for... for whatever involvement he had. He was probably holding the strings behind all this.

Dance puppets, dance. Hahaha look how stupid you are.

Then Shikamaru winced as a sharp pain shot briefly through his skull.

Oh damn. He heard me.

Again his breath hissed in as suddenly it felt as if a thousand cats were all clawing on a chalkboard in his head.

With both hands he clutched at it, squeezing as if the pressure would force it out. Holy shit this was even worse than not breathing.

I'm sorry! He thought. He vaguely heard himself groaning out loud. Oh it was a nightmare, his vision was shuddering and his ears felt as if they might start bleeding if his entire head didn't just explode first!

His fingers tangled in his hair and a few chunks were pulled from his ponytail as he worked to free himself from it.

There, it dulled ever so slightly, and without even taking time to think about it he ripped the band from his hair and let it down.

Instantly it was gone, he was in a quiet candlelit room and there wasn't a single noise to be heard, he couldn't even hear the traffic, which was far beyond weird.

Eyes wide in confusion, he ran a hand through his free hair.

"What the hell was that about?" He panted. Jashin didn't like ponytails, apparently. He'd never had a problem with it before...

"You could've just fucking asked me to do it!" He shouted to the empty room.

Then again, this was a deity that encouraged murder and self-destruction. He was probably laughing his ass off wherever he is.

"He didn't like it when I started getting my hair either."

Shikamaru jumped and twisted to the new voice, wishing he could stop the smirk that formed on his face when he saw none other than the albino himself standing just inside the window with his arms crossed.

A sudden warm feeling bloomed in the Nara's chest, so strong that it made him dizzy.

"Don't get distracted. Finish the meditation. Kakuzu always fucking interrupted me, pain in my ass." He muttered, coming to sit in front of Shikamaru calmly. Shikamaru felt a pang of sadness at the mention of Hidan's fallen lover. But he pushed it away. He couldn't let himself feel for the psycho. He had to concentrate.. but...

Hidan wasn't wearing a shirt, of course he wasn't wearing a shirt. That would be too convenient for Shikamaru. That would keep him from admiring how Hidan's rain dampened skin shimmered in the candlelight, how it made his chest look even more chisled.

He closed his eyes to get away from the image. Dammit Hidan, oblivious fucking Hidan, why? Just... just *why*?

At least he stayed silent so Shikamaru could focus, the warm feeling wasn't going away. At least it didn't hurt, though it was uncomfortable.

Actually, it was nice, he just didn't like it because he knew that it wasn't him doing it, it was Jashin, making him feel things he didn't really feel. He didn't feel anything for Hidan, it was just the demented God trying to force a new lover on his most beloved deciple. That's all it was.

Right?

The feeling strengthened when he took a deep breath. Holy hell that felt good, it was like how he sometimes felt after smoking just the exact right amount of pot. He just felt so at peace, all the sudden. Like everything was fine, he had no worries in all the world.

Oh yeah... this was nice...

... Now what was it he was doing?

Oh right right, he was praying to Jashin.

Heh, heheheh. He was worshipping an intangible entity. Shikamaru Nara, the genius strategist and world renowned athiest was getting high with the God of slaughter. But wait, he wasn't smoking, oh yeah! This was Jashin's handywork. It was *good* handiwork, damn... if he could bottle this and sell it he would never have to work another day in his life.

He heard himself chuckle out loud at the idea, and then for some reason the fact that he was laughing made him do it even harder.

He opened his eyes, still giggling.

"Oh... I forgot you came in.." he drawled, and both Hidan's eyebrows shot up.

"Are you stoned? Fuck, I shoulda known something was weird when I found you praying without me having to fucking force you." Hidan said, twisting his upper torso to pop his back. "You know you gotta share now that I'm here right, ya pineapple head."

Shikamaru just laughed even harder. He had been upset with Hidan, why was that? He couldn't remember, he couldn't even imagine how it felt to be upset right now. He felt so *good* .

"You can't call me that, see?" He said, running his hand through his hair, and then touseling it. "No pineapple. So shut up you *greaser*." He said, and then burst out laughing at the image of Hidan in a leather jacket and tight pants and a toothpick...

No wait... that wasn't funny. That was hot.

Damn, Hidan would look good in just about anything. That was so unfair.

Shikamaru had never been insecure, but theres some stuff he just looked rediculous in.

"Your hair looks better like that," Hidan said, breaking him from his thoughts. It took him a moment to blink away the blurry Hidan and focus on him.

Hidans eyes drifted to the floor, lost in thought, and Shikamaru tilted his head. Why did he look so sad? This was a happy time! The Nara felt amazing! He never felt amazing, this was something to celebrate over.

"I don't like it when people put their hair up. I know it gets in their face and shit but..You look better like this... your hair looks like..." Hidan paused, his brow creasing. Then he lifted his gaze and met Shikamaru's. "It's just better."

Hidan's eyes were getting a little glazed over, Shika thought. Was Jashin making him feel this too? He couldn't be, Hidan looked sullen, not relaxed and at peace with the world.

Wait, why was he here again? They were mad at each other or something weren't they? But... oh well. He didn't care right now. He'd worry about it when he stopped feeling so wonderful. He had to enjoy this, before he was miserable again. Miserable and lonely..

He realized he was staring at the candle absentmindedly, and refocused on the fellow Jashinist in front of him.

"You should join me." He slurred, and Hidan looked at him like he'd just told him an elephant flew out his ass.

Shikamaru spent a good 5 minutes trying to regain control of his body after being unable to contain the laughter that thought caused.

"What the hell is wrong with you pineapple head? You're being fucking weird."

"Hidan." Shikamaru said, suddenly serious as a heart attack. "You... are being a buzzkill. So put a little blood in your mouth and ask Jashin to share some of the stuff he's giving me." His solemn expression relaxed and he chuckled. "Because it's... it's just really awesome."

Hidan stared in confusion, but the zealot would never pass up an opportunity to indulge a fellow disciple of the great and mighty Jashin. This is what Shikamaru assumed at least, as the albino swiftly pulled out a razorblade from his pocket and opened it with a click.

"Ahh, you're on a blood-high. I haven't gotten one of those fuckers in awhile." He rose to his feet just long enough to grab a soiled sheet, fold it in half and lay it out under him.

Awe. Shikamaru thought, smiling. How considerate.

Without even a second thought the silver-haired man drug the blade across his palm and held it above his head, tongue hanging out.

... Wow... Shikamaru couldn't look away as the blood trickled onto the outstretched muscle. Yeah, random fact, tongues are muscles.

That was blood, It was just Hidan tasting his own blood. Why was he reacting like this?

He absently licked his lips. Damn, maybe this was how Hidan felt that last time when they'd prayed together.

Hidan quickly and efficiently made a circle around him, stopping once for a heartbeat to give Shikamaru a weird look.

"Told'ja candles help." He said, grinning to Shikamaru, who couldn't help but admire it, and then put his hands on his knees and bowed his head ever-so-slightly.

Shikamaru watched him for a moment. There it was again, he was so calm and serene. He was nice like this, no scowling or grimacing or arguing or snarky comments. He looked like a normal person.

His chest was warm again, so was his stomach. He was aware of his heart beating really loud, and his eyes widened slightly when he heard someone whisper to him.

"Stop resisting, and I will help you."

That, that was from his was the same voice. That was... it was Jashin! Of course! Why hadn't he realized that right away?

Stop resisting. Stop resisting.

Okay, okay he could do that. He felt like he could do anything right now, his heart was racing and he felt this sudden excitement even though he didn't really know why.

It felt amazing, if it felt this good to be a Jashinist, hell yea he'd do it. A million times yes.

He took a really deep breath, letting his eyes close, and relaxed. Relaxed everything. He relaxed his body, his mind, he let all his thoughts trickle away, he focused on this beautiful feeling, on how utterly wonderful he felt right now. This is what he wanted, this is what he'd asked for. Jashin had given it as a gift.

Just like in the dream. " *This is my gift to you.*" He had said, and then someone had grabbed Shikamaru and held him. And all his heartache and pain and miserable lonely thoughts went away and his heart hurt with how much relief it was to just feel wanted like that.

He opened his eyes, the excited feeling bubbling in his torso was becoming too much to handle. He wanted to do something, he needed to get up and run, he wanted to tackle someone, wrestle someone.

Hidan's violet eyes opened slowly, almost lazily. Shikamaru watched as he lifted his head and their eyes met.

And something exploded within his chest.

He realized in the giant wave of that something that rolled through him that it was *him* . Jashin gave Shikamaru *him* . It was a perfect fit for them both, even if it was wrong. That's what made it so right.

Hidan smiled at him, and before realizing what he was doing, before he could stop himself, Shikamaru lunged.

He landed on his knees with his outstretched palms on Hidan's shoulders, fingers splayed wide curling around hard muscle. Eyes still locked with now wide open amethyst.

Hidan's gaze flicked down to the Naras lips before coming back up again. He didn't move, didn't react in anyway. The heated, rain

slicked flesh felt so amazing under Shikamarus hands. He subconsciously leaned in closer. So close that he could feel warm breath ghost over his lips.

The air seemed to become heavier in the few moments they just looked at each other, time almost standing still. Then a larger hand gripped shikas hip and he was pulled into that strong body. He moved, following the pulling hand and ended up straddling the older mans muscled thighs. His hands had slid up to grip the back of Hidan's neck, his fingers tangling into the short silver tresses at the base of his nape.

His heart was literally hammering in his rib cage and his breathing continued to get shorter as the zealot wrapped his other arm around shikamarus waist. The hand that was previously gripping his hip pushed up through the bottom of his T-shirt and ran from the base of his spine up, up, up, only to dive into his hair. Shikamarus breath hitched as Hidan tugged him forward, holding him just centimeters away from his mouth.

They hadn't broken eye contact but to blink this whole time. Everything was so intimate. Half lidded violet eyes seemed to stare right into his very soul. It felt so good, so right to be held like this. The heat that was still spreading through his body seemed to intensify and he released a shaky breath then closed his eyes.

Parted lips finally connected with a smirking pair and a mutual sound of pleasure filled the quiet, candlelit room.

The elder Jashinist used his grip in shikamarus hair to tilt his face to the right and the kiss deepened. Hidan's taste flooded his system like a drug, carving molten fire into his veins. It burned so good. The hold Hidan had on his waist tightened and he was pulled flush against the hard body, hips meeting hips, chest to chest.

When the hot, slick muscle pushed past shikamarus lips a groan from deep in his chest was torn from his body. He was vaguely

aware of his own trembling and might of even been a little ashamed if he didn't feel so damn good. If Hidan didn't feel so right in his arms.

The kiss was so unyielding and dominant, unlike anything he'd ever felt before. The grip in his hair had just the right amount of pained pleasure, and he melted into the embrace.

As tongues thrust against each other, previously idle hands began to move. Tugging at clothing and bare skin, nails digging into flesh and hair. Shikamaru ripped his mouth away to gasp for the breath that he hadn't known he'd been holding. His whole being on fire as harsh fingers literally ripped his shirt from his flushed torso with a sharp tearing sound.

Then that scorching, devilish mouth attached to the nape of his neck, teeth scraping against sinew and his head was jerked back by the handful of hair in Hidan's grasp.

His own hands pulled the wicked mouth closer. A profanity slipping from his panting lips, only to be responded with a roll of Hidan's hips that had him moaning like a two dollar whore.

He hadn't noticed how fucking hard he was until then and the knowledge of finding out that Hidan was just as hot and bothered from him, gave him so much satisfaction.

His world was suddenly shifted to where his back was pressed against sheet covered carpet and Hidan hovering over him. The feverishly hot, calloused hands assaulting the taut skin stretching over his flat abdomen. Blunt nails raked over Shikamaru's hip bones, then he was pulled against the zealot by Hidan's grip on his pelvis.

Legs spread wide and Hidan's heavy weight pressing down on him. It felt so fucking good, the fire in him threatened to consume his soul.

Shikamaru grabbed at the waistline of Hidan's ripped denim, shakily trying to get them open. He wanted him naked, them both naked, to feel the burn of flesh on flesh. He got the button undone when his

wrists were grabbed in a bruising grasp and forced over his head in one large hand, Hidan's mouth at his ear.

"Slow down... I want to enjoy this." Hidan's voice was liquid sin, and it both thrilled and scared him to death. The free hand of the zealot pushed its way under his lower back and into the back of his jeans. His left ass cheek was grabbed so harshly that he should of cried out in pain, but what came out was a twisted strained version of Hidan's name.

His back arched off the floor and he threw his head back, eyes wide. That's when he noticed why. They were still in the circle. Oh Jashin, beautiful Jashin, he'd never felt this before. Never been this wanton or this needy.

Hips were pressed into his so roughly, again and again, as the older Jashinist continued his assault on his neck and mouth. The rutting continued until shikamaru was in tears and begging "Please, fucking please! Just hurry up!" His voice cracking and hitching.

Hands and mouth left his flesh and he barley managed to prop himself on his elbow through his shaking. The Naras eyes half lidded as he watched Hidan undo shikamarus jeans pulling them off along with his underwear, and tossing them randomly behind him.

His cock hurt so wonderfully, and it was weeping onto his lower stomach. He wanted to touch himself but he was too consumed with the need to touch Hidan.

He found strength then to sit up all the way and tugged the zealot to him by his waistband. Hidan still kneeling between his spread legs. Still trembling fingers touched and then squeezed the bulge that Hidan's jeans did nothing to hide. Shikamarus other hand finally pulling the zipper down and with a sharp movement had the denim pulled down corded, athletic legs.

His hair was fisted again at the back of his skull. he flicked his gaze up to meet smouldering violet, and the demonic smirk. Gaze still

fixed on Hidans eyes, he felt the blunt head of the zealots cock slide wetly over his parted lips. He watched Hidan's face contort in pleasure and licked his lips, groaning at the taste.

Before he even realized what he was doing, Hidan's cock was so deep in his mouth that he felt it pushing on the back of his throat. The older Jashinist used the hold on his hair to move him back as he swore.

"Fuck. Easy, you wouldn't want me to come on that pretty face before we get to the fun part", Hidan growled out in a husky whisper. Shikamaru felt his face flush from Hidan's words and he was hungrily shoved backwards again.

His hips were raised until his ass was laying on pale thighs and Hidan clutched his hips in a crushing hold. The nara stared down at himself, watching his stomach tremble and his bruised legs shake. He looked up as he felt blunt, moist pressure on his hole.

Hidan looked so sexy, his hair was mussed and he was sweating. His panting making the chiselled muscles of his chest and his abs strain against his pale skin. Hellfire eyes staring right back at him, making his heart almost skip a beat. He knew that Hidan didn't plan on preparing him but, he also knew that Jashin still had them in his clutches.

Shikamaru bravely pulled Hidan into himself with his legs only a fraction of an inch and then he was suddenly being ripped into. He felt his walls tear and the blood run out of him onto the sheet but his scream was one of ecstasy.

Hidan paused only for a second to mumble something Shikamaru didn't catch then he was being pounded into the carpet. Tan legs being held in the crook of muscled pale arms, and he was bent double. It was mind numbing pleasure. The nara's nails scraping into the tops of Hidan's shoulders until crimson poured from there too.

At first the thrusts were dry and they stung pleasantly, then the blood acted as lubricant and he was in heaven. Or maybe even hell, he didn't care, as long as Hidan didn't stop this torture. His prostate was being rammed on the inward thrust, every sharp stab making him scream.

Shikamaru couldn't breathe. His insides ached wonderfully and he was being hammered into so hard that a few drops of scarlet shower down onto him from his clawing hands.

It was all to fucking good to last. The heat inside him suddenly exploded and his back arched completely off the sheet. translucent ropes of his escents streamed out of him, spraying his chest, some shooting onto his parted lips and chin as he felt scalding silk fill his abused ass.

The sound of groaning in the room faded out into a load humming noise. The last thing he saw before his. Vision tunneled out, was Hidan lick the blood from his own lips. The violet eyes closed serenely. His world fadded into blackness as a wet tongue traced his dirtied mouth. And he sank into the peaceful dark.

A/N-

... Uh..

..uh..

I have to go.. take care of something. xD

BUT REVIEW REVIEW REVIEW! Fluffyisemo will probably be monitering these reviews, and she may or may not eat your soul/be your best friend ever if you hated/liked her work.

Also, apologies for typos and spelling and all that crap. I basically just skimmed this before putting it up, kinda in a super-rush right now.

Love you all! Expect the next chapter soon!

Unease and reunions

Recurring Nightmares

Bliss. Such sweet relieving bliss that he could hardly wrap his head around it.

It must be impossible to be this happy, to feel this fulfilled. If he wasn't in heaven then there was no other explanation. Nothing else could compare to the satisfaction he felt. He wanted to cry, but from uncontrollable joy this time.

He could die right now, he could pass away and not give the smallest damn in the world.

He was just so... so fucking happy.

A content sigh escaped him, and with a start he realized he must be awake, though he couldn't for the life of him remember falling asleep.

His eyes fluttered open, and he was more than aware of the calm smile he wore. Light flooded the room and his heart soared when he saw his kitchen. His old kitchen, the spacious ones with a million cuboards that you didn't have to cram everything into, the giant island that Neji was always making something delicious smelling on, The big patio doors that led to the deck out back and the front door just diagonal across the room from it.

It.. it was all a terrible nightmare! The apartment, Neji leaving, Hidan being alive. It never happened, it couldn't have, how else would he feel so happy?

He wanted to scream from the amazing tightness in his chest, he wanted to skip and sing and hug every item in the house and thank it personally for not ceasing to exist. The air itself was electric with his homecoming and he felt a tear of pure relief slip down his cheek.

He had to find Neji, he had to find him and hug him and kiss him into oblivion. He would take him out to the most expensive restaurant he could find and get him a lifetime free pass to a spa and buy him whatever he wanted until he was absolutely swimming in debt.

He didn't care! He couldn't care! He was back home and everything was back to how it should be and Hidan and Itachi and the Akatsuki never even existed.

The whole entire thing was a fabrication of his terribly evil but brilliant mind.

Oh fuck you brain, fuck you but thank you and I love you.

"Neji!" He called out, vaulting over the island and nearly crashing into the small portion of wall that separated the kitchen and livingroom that Neji always whined about 'ruining the open concept'.

He only laughed as he caught himself and sprinted through the hall down to the bedroom. He kicked open the door and would have been embarrassed at the whining squeal he made if he wasn't so overcome with such beautiful raw joy.

There he was! Standing there looking out the window. His long beautiful hair was in its crazy ponytail down by the ends, he was dressed in casual clothes, and damn his ass looked as sexy as ever.

"Neji..." He sighed gently, but his lover didn't turn around. He continued staring silently out the window. It was the same window they always stared out those two years ago... No.. none of that had happened. He knew deep in the pit of his stomach that this could not possibly be a dream.

"I missed you so much..." Tears ran down his face as he stepped toward the brunette miracle in front of him, arms outstretched and ready for an embrace.

Several things suddenly happened, faster than Shikamaru could comprehend.

One, the house around him began to ooze and melt as if made of wax. It was a slow process, and really it was one of the last things he noticed.

The first of which was Neji whirling around, his face looked like that of a broken china doll who's eyes had fallen out.

"We're broken Shikamaru!" the Neji-doll wailed in a voice that was like ten Neji's combined, each with a different pitch.

His body jerked as it moved forward and Shikamaru was too scared to move or scream. As this was happening his body suddenly burst into a roaring pain that could only be compared to being set on fire. Just under his range of vision he could almost feel the flames licking at him, and somehow he knew without looking that he was standing within a symbol of Jashin set ablaze.

He could not move his feet, he could not release the muscles in his throat to scream, he couldn't escape the house melting around him, he couldn't run away from the zombie Neji.

"Look at me Shika! I thought you loved me!" The monster shrieked, lurching closer with agonizingly slow steps.

"How could you do this to me!? Shikamaru! SHIKAMARU!"

He stared open mouthed, paralyzed in his fear and confusion. How could he have possibly done this? How could this be his fault?!

"You left." He finally choked out, And as he looked down at the fire, he suddenly felt a presence behind him. He did not know for sure who it was, but there was only one name that rang through his head.

"I did everything I could for you." He said slowly, strength slowly filtering into his body as he felt that continued presence, the fire of

the circle underneath him seemed to only flare up more, but the pain was dying away.

"I am *sick* of hearing that. " He took a deep breath, trying to control himself as his fear turning to raging anger.

It was not his fault. He was not blaming himself anymore. He could not get better with Neji constantly throwing these insults at him, mudding up his mind.

"I loved you. I loved you more than anything. I gave up EVERYTHING to get you away from that place. I poured my soul into making sure you knew how much I loved you."

"YOU BROKE ME SHIKAMARU! You've broken me again! How could you do it? I thought you loved me but you went and did it again!" The beast squealed, peices of the porceilan face breaking off and falling to the melting ground.

He stood his ground, gritting his teeth and ignoring the pain it's words brought. He closed his eyes to take a breath.

"You're the one who left." He said quietly, "You are the one who left me. I saved you. Asuma died, Hidan died, but you stayed alive. You stayed alive because of me. "

His voice rose as he continued, and the slow steps of the nightmaric Neji-creature in front of him ceased as he leaned forward to glare.

"YOU left. YOU did this. I won't let you torture me." He paused, realization slamming into him and only increasing his flow of power.

"And you're not even real. You can't hurt me. Not anymore. " He retracted his arm, closing it around the object manifesting itself into his hand and he swung, watching in slow-motion as a triple bladed scythe came into view and slammed into the Neji-monster.

It shattered like glass and he felt a sharp stinging on his face suddenly.

"Pineapple head." A quiet voice echoed. Shikamaru paused, Hidan? That was his voice, why did he sound so far away. Why did he want to find him so desperately?

He looked down to the weapon in his hands. And then the pile of china-doll Neji of the floor. Then he whirled around, Someone had been behind him. He knew who it was, but now they were gone and he couldn't remember...

"Hey dipshit!"

There was Hidan's voice again, louder, and Shikamaru's head jerked to the right as his opposite cheek now stung.

The melting house began to fade to black around him. What the hell was going on!?

"I SAAAIID, wake the fuck up!"

Shikamaru's eyes opened up to a pair of violet ones glaring back.

"SHIT!" He shouted, pushing him away. Then he shouted again as his entire body complained of the movement. He slapped his hand to his forehead as the world spun and he heard an obnoxious laugh.

"You're so adorable right now pineapple head, seriously." He heard Hidan say behind closed lids.

"Oh... damnn." He moaned, trying his hardest to sit up and not whimper like a newborn pup.

Wait a second, why was he on the floor? And why... HOLY SHIT!

He didn't even try to contain the humiliating yelp that emitted as he grabbed the random sheets on the ground and threw them over himself.

"HIDAN!" He both whined and growled. "Get the hell out! I'm fucking naked you goddamn psycho perve!"

Hidan burst into another fit of laughter, doubling over almost.

"WHAT THE HELL IS SO FUNNY?!" Shikamaru roared, trying to hurry himself to his feet but only able to move at the torturous pace of a sloth from the severe dull ache reverberating from every inch of his being.

"Oh Jashin, it's like déjàvu!" The priest cackled before straightening up and leaning his head back to help catch his breath. After a few excruciating moments Shikamaru was on his feet and sprinting to the bedroom. Damn the pain, Hidan already had an eyeful.

Shit, what did he *do* last night?

And with that thought it all came slamming back to him. It was only hazy memories, as if he'd been drunk out of his mind and stoned and drugged on lsd all at the same time.

Oohhh God...

Owch! Motherfucker! Okayokay... Jashin.

What the hell? What was he thinking. Oh no... ooohno!ohno!ohno!

C'mon.. *really* ? This wasn't even fair!

The strange serenity he felt while trying his damndest to have a meltdown was really pissing him off even more than the fact that he'd had sex with Hidan.

If there was ever a time to freakout, this was it. Every other time before this paled in comparison! But still he could only sigh and lean back against his closed bedroom door.

Why? Why didn't he... why didn't he *regret* it. His head knew better, it was still trying desperately to convince him of what a horrible

mistake he'd made. But his heart continued on beating at a monotonous, steady pace. He felt nothing but an eerie sense of peace. He could probably fall back asleep if not for that stupid nightmare.

Yes, the nightmare, possibly even more troubling than his predicament.

The tables have turned in his subconscious, it seemed. How could sweet, beautiful Neji strike fear in him? How could psychotic, unpredictable Hidan give him strength and confidence?

He was literally losing his mind. He was off the deep end, his marbles were gone and every other saying that goes with it.

No normal human being just went from mortal enemies to having sex in a matter of... like a week. He couldn't even remember how long it had been.

Not long enough.

Sure, he'd had slightly over half a year to get over Neji. It wasn't like he'd been in bed with someone else after a week.

But *him*? REALLY?

"Hhoooooooooh my fucking God this is a draaaaaaag.." he groaned, running his hand over his face.

Quickly, he jerked it away. Fuck, it was covered in dried blood.

He looked down at himself, throwing away the sheets now that he remembered what they were.

FUUCK! He was caked in blood.

"Son of a bitch." He muttered, sliding down the door until he was sitting. "Son of a dirty goddamned bitch."

"Quit moping and take a fuckin' shower!" Hidan shouted, most likely in the livingroom. "Dirty bitch."

Shikamaru just grimaced. Did he really have no shame at all? Did he really not realize how much this complicated things?

How could he be so... so *Hidan* right now! Damn! He didn't even know if they'd at least cuddled afterward!

Wait, would that make the situation worse or better?

WHY WAS HE EVEN THINKING ABOUT THIS!?

He sighed. What did one do in these situations. Maybe he should ask online. Hah! That would be entertaining, at the least.

Okay, really though... Neji... Neji was gone. If he were going to change his mind, he would be back by now. It's not as if he'd done him wrong... Except for sleeping with and possibly developing feelings for the man who'd ruined his ability to live a normal life, the man whom the Hyuga hated more than anything.

Shika let his face fall into his hands.

This was a giant mess. It just kept getting messier.

Jesus, he hadn't screwed up in nearly two years, not counting Neji leaving, and he just counted that as a continuation of that first disaster.

"This is not my fault. This can't possibly be my fault." He muttered so quietly he almost didn't hear it himself. He was fighting supernatural forces here, he was waaaay out of his league. There was no way to use Jashin's power for his own means, unless he changed those means to what Jashin wanted.

Then he'd be nothing but another Hidan. And he didn't want to be alive to see what would happen to the world if there were two psycho Jashinist priests running amuck.

Alright Shikamaru. He said, forcing himself slowly back to his feet. The pain was already receding, thanks to his stupid cult. *Baby steps. Take a shower, eat something.* And maybe Hidan would be up for some sparring. He could beat the shit out of him and not piss anyone off.

... Well... everything pisses the crazy albino off... But still.

He carefully opened the door, peeking out and hating himself for acting like some shy teenage girl. He couldn't help it though, every time he tried to convince himself to just walk casually to the bathroom, random, foggy memories of last night popped into his head.

Hidan's breath on his neck, his teeth sinking into his flesh, his raw, *hungry* voice, how fucking unexplainably amazing it felt when that pain turned to pleasure.

He shook his head violently and slammed his palm to his forehead repeatedly. *Don't even think about thinking about it!* He had to get this disgusting mix of body fluids off him, even the notion of half of them being Hidan's made him want to throw up... and roll around in them at the same time.

Fucking hell he needed therapy.

"Hidan, go burn these sheets while I'm in the shower kay?"

Silence.

Did he leave?

Oh please let him be gone, let him at least have that much sensibility to realize how awkward it would be for him to be here.

"Is that an order?" His voice finally called back just when Shikamaru was about to relax.

Damn, well at least he could get rid of him for a few moments.

"Yes. I order you to go burn these sheets to a crisp. All three of them." He paused for a second, listening for the sounds of Hidan shifting to do as he said.

"I don't think you're in any position to give me any fucking orders, considering the positions you were in last night."

Goddamn it, that was it. He was definitely going to knock his fucking head off.

"Dammit Hidan just do it and give me a little fucking privacy to clear my head." He growled, finally just pushing the door open and storming into the bathroom.

But when he turned around to shut the door the albino was suddenly there, shoving it back open. Shikamaru only had time to gasp before Hidan was chest to chest with him and had a green fingernailed finger over his lips. He was looking down at him, seeing as the Nara was an inch or two shorter, and a shiver ran down his spine.

"Don't try to forget." Hidan said, his voice smooth and soft. The abstract sound made Shika's heart twinge, and Hidan, almost as if sensing it, smirked.

"The first blood-high is the best. Every other one following it is weaker and weaker. No other feeling compares. I've tried every drug in existence, and it's never the same."

Shikamaru felt himself blushing as he remembered his total lack of clothes at these close quarters, goddamn it he was a man! Why couldn't he act like one?

"Don't push it away. Remember it, treasure it."

Wow... Hidan hadn't cussed through that whole speech, and he was speaking in a voice that was so foreign to his personality that it gave Shikamaru goosebumps. Hidan wasn't gentle, or caring. He was an insane, vulgar, loud idiot with a temper and personal space issues.

Then in a flash this stranger was gone and the normal zealous idiot was back in his eyes and grin.

"You're just fucking lucky I was here to show you a good time. Wasting the first high should be a sin. That's like losing your virginity to another virgin, fucking shitty."

Aaand they were right back into the awkwardness.

Shikamaru focused chakra in his hands enough to make them glow the usual purple/black and shoved Hidan from the bathroom. He winced when he heard the crack of the drywall, but slammed and locked the door regardless.

No, a locked door wouldn't do anything against the man if he really wanted in, but it comforted him none-the-less.

"HEY! THAT FUCKING HURT PINEAPPLE HEAD!"

Damn, he was gonna get kicked out of this place, what with people climbing in and out the window, the few spatters of blood on the carpet that soaked through the sheets, the constant yelling between himself and Hidan, and now a crack in the wall.

He started the water and pinched the bridge of his nose as he waited for it to warm.

He wasn't even going to make plans anymore. He would set a goal and hoped to all hell he would reach it without sacrificing anything important. Damn he hated being unprepared, but at least this way he would be doing it on purpose, he wouldn't have to waste energy freaking out or getting angry.

This whole thing, the entire last few years of his life, was just a giant drag.

"Don't assume shit, Pineapple head." Hidan said, standing with his hip cocked and his scythe slung over his shoulders.

"Any more wisdom for me sensei?" Shikamaru replied sarcastically from a few yards away. He was stretching out his muscles, trying to control his sudden excitement at once again combating with Hidan. It was curious that he wasn't afraid of the hot-headed albino losing his temper and trying to kill him. But then again, the man had had plenty of chances to kill him if he'd still wanted to. In fact the zealot had actually gone out of his way to not only keep him alive but help him recover faster. Even if he tried to hide his reasoning behind Jashin, Shikamaru knew the truth, thanks to that random reunion with Itachi.

Oh crap, he wanted to talk to Hidan still. And that shameless idiot would probably tell him and the entire world what happened between them.

Fuuck, *no* ! No one else could know until he could regain control of this situation. He had to make Hidan promise not to tell.

Shikamaru smiled to himself, sounded like a perfectly good bargain to make after he'd knocked the hell out of his 'slave'.

"You shithead! I mean don't think you know everything about how I fight, expect the unexpected..." Hidan swung the scythe to point it at him in what Shikamaru assumed was supposed to be a menacing way. It was hard to see the man as a threat anymore, it happens after beating them twice and a session of hankey-pankey.

"If you expect it then technically it's not unexpected..." The Nara drawled, silently activating his jutsu and capturing Hidan's lone shadow. The idiot, it was over before it began.

They had ended up on the roof of the complex, why was something Shikamaru was unsure of.

Hidan had returned after Shika had finished his shower and caught him off guard, *again* . He'd grabbed Shikamaru and pulled him close

as if wanting a kiss, and while the spikey-haired man was doing his best to convince himself he didn't want it, Hidan had stolen the ponytail from his hair.

It wouldn't have been a big deal if Shikamaru hadn't gone to the bathroom to get another and discovered them all missing. Apparently Hidan really, *really* liked him with his hair down.

Damn it, he was flirting with him in an annoying Hidan sort of way, and it was troublesome. After their little chat before his shower the two had been acting as if it was never to be mentioned again. And Shikamaru was fine with that, last time he'd tried to clear the air... well, you know.

So he figured he'd just ignore it.

Anywho, Hidan had of course disappeared out the window and Shikamaru took the stairs to the roof after almost stupidly running after him. He'd watched for only a second as Hidan worked his way up the vertical incline with the grace of a practiced gymnast. He leaped from one sill to the other, using his scythe to hook onto ledges and indentions above him and swing himself up, not once losing momentum.

Then he tore his eyes away and sprinted full-speed up the stairs. He knew chasing after the man was just what he wanted, though Shikamaru had no idea why. And he wasn't going to try to figure it out either, that would just be a waste of time and energy.

He'd finally burst through the door to be greeted by the most beautiful and least smoggy sunset he'd ever seen in the city. Usually the buildings had the light blocked out long before the sun actually set, but his complex was one of the taller structures on this corner portion of the city on the edge of the suburbs. Hidan was facing him, though all that could be seen was his silhouette, and Shikamaru panicked in his attempt to both memorize the moment and stop himself from being so struck by the beauty.

Dammit Hidan...

He broke himself from the mesmerizing moment and lunged at the ponytail thief. After a brief scuffle and Shikamaru managing to break Hidan's nose with a swing of his elbow, The priest agreed to have a training session with each other to work out some anger instead of storming off or all the other various things he did when upset.

After all, they *were* kind of like rivals.

Suddenly he felt the familiar presence behind him and leaped just in time to avoid having a scythe in his ribcage.

What the hell?

He turned to see the Hidan he captured poof away. A clone? Hidan could make clones? Since when!?

Hidan shrilled and continued coming at him, with Shikamaru just barely able to dodge.

Using his scythe like a pole-vault, Hidan was able to land a kick and send Shikamaru on a rolling collision with the ground.

He got his feet under him just before he would have gone sailing off the roof and skidded to a stop. But the zealot was relentless, still coming at him with a ferocity that made him wonder if this really was all in good fun.

Bah, of course it was. The disciple of the God of slaughter was just enjoying himself, letting loose.

At least he hoped so.

More excitement rushed his veins and he launched himself forward, running in an arc and pushing off at the last moment to flip over Hidan and land just as the priest swung in the wrong direction, leaving himself completely open to a barrage from Shika's shadow-hazed fists.

Hidan made a choking sound but didn't collapse as he'd done the first time. He was getting used to it, and it helped that Shikamaru didn't have lethal intent powering the attack.

His albino opponent clumsily swung his weapon as he tried to keep control of his body until the jutsu wore off. It was an easy dodge, and Shikamaru just stepped back before kneeing him in the stomach and slamming an elbow onto the nape of his neck.

Hidan fell limply to the ground, and Shikamaru was almost upset, that was it?

Suddenly his feet were above his head and a black pike was being held to his throat.

"I really fucking *hate* that attack." Hidan growled, fiery violet eyes glaring into his, a little too close for comfort. Shikamaru could smell him, damn, he'd never noticed Hidan's natural scent before. It was.. wonderful.

"Yeah, that's why I keep using it on you." Shikamaru replied, the smile he was wearing felt just a little strange on his face. He built chakra up within him to use the move that had finished Hidan off the last time they fought, but seeming to sense this, the silver hair jerked back. This gave Shika the room to kick upwards, catching the man in the chin and laying him out for only a millisecond before he was back on his feet, charging.

The thought of Hidan's using clones had him worked up, so he *could* use jutsu! What else could he do? Had he really been holding back, even when he'd almost been killed?

The two collided amidst a leap and Shikamaru maneuvered the stake from Hidan's hands and kicked him away.

His heart received a rush of adrenaline when Hidan went sailing off the edge of the building, and Shikamaru almost started to go make sure he wasn't dead when he was tackled from behind.

He saw stars briefly when his head smashed into the concrete and he cried out when his arm was twisted behind his back and yanked upward to the point where it was almost dislocated.

Some strange mixture of a laugh and a growl escape him as he used the weapon in his other hand, swinging backward and almost cackling with joy as he felt it pierce skin and heard the pained grunt. Then he shoved chakra into it and Hidan stiffened again, relaxing his grip involuntarily enough for Shikamaru to free himself and shove the man off him.

Shikamaru stood panting as he waited for his opponent to collect himself. His chest was almost burning with the want to stop holding back. This pinning and tackling shit was getting annoying. They weren't kids in fucking school dammit.

His eyes seemed to move on their own, coming to a rest on the blood dripping from the tightly gripped pike in his hands, and the hair on his necks prickled as his mouth involuntarily stretched into a grin.

He was a Jashinist, he prayed, he had a blood-high... what if he could do the sacrificial ritual too.

Hidan finally straightened on his feet, cracking his neck. "This is bullshit, I have to actually try to kill you to do any fuckin' damage..." He said, hesitating when Shikamaru's eyes flicked up to meet violet. A whirlpool of emotions raged within them, and Shikamaru's heart started racing even faster as his arm raised the bloodied tip to his mouth without his order.

"Pineapple head..." Hidan warned, but he didn't stop, he *couldn't* stop. His body was moving on his own.

"Hey!" Hidan half-shouted. "Knock it off! You can't handle that shit yet!"

Shikamaru felt his eyes narrow, he knew he still needed to make a circle beneath him before he could even tell if it would work, but just

the tone of the priests voice was enough of a giveaway.

He could do it, he could sacrifice Hidan right now! He could give his immortal soul to Jashin in place of his freedom from this nightmare of a religion! It would work out so perfectly, there was no way Hidan would escape that.

He heard a deranged sounding snicker and blanched when he realized the sound had come from him. And the burning sensation was now winding it's way through his whole body, like a super-concentrated dose of adrenaline.

He could feel his muscles twitching with the need to move, the desire to kill the man in front of him plumed through him. He held the end of the stake just a centimeter from his mouth, tilting his head in a challenge to Hidan.

The next thing he knew something heavy had rammed into him with such force that the weapon flew from his hand.

Suddenly he was falling, and a sharp sting made him blink before his eyes focused on Hidan, teeth gritted and glaring daggers at him.

"Wake the fuck up or you're gonna splat!" He snarled, but Shikamaru's body was moving on it's own again, twisting itself into a position where he would land on his feet.

He heard a harsh clattering and then cracking of concrete above him and knew somehow without looking that Hidan was now perched on his scythe on the side of the building like a gargoyle. He could sense him that well now.

Shikamaru was mildly put off by the fact that his fellow Jashinist had failed to help him, but then he remembered what Hidan said about Jashin hating those who couldn't fend for themselves.

Chakra poured into his feet and pooled there until he could almost feel it slosh around like water all the way up his legs. He knew he

was smiling and it only made the desperation to stop himself from smashing into the ground grow.

What the hell was he doing? It was like he was fucking possessed, he only had brief moments of clarity and here the rest of the time he was so overcome with this strange feeling that he couldn't help but act like a psycho!

Cars came to a screeching halt, by-passers wobbled on their feet before turning wide-eyed to the disturbance.

Like he was Superman, Shikamaru landed on the concrete, sending out a dark pulse as he did to soften the landing and using the chakra in his feet like a cushioning for his bones. The ground cratered under him and the deafening boom and simultaneous cracking of concrete had everyone down the entire block gaping at him in awe and fear both.

He looked briefly around him at the civilians through his bangs before straightening himself up and smoothing his hair back out of his face.

Something snapped him in the cheek then and with reflexes far too quick to be his own he caught it before it hit the ground. He stared at the tiny band in his hands before looking up to Hidan, who nodded down the street.

Shikamaru looked that was for only a second before turning back, not understanding what the man was trying to tell him, but there was nothing left but the damage the Jashinists scythe had caused on the wall.

He shrugged and quickly scooped up his hair into a ponytail and tried to make sense of the sudden distance he felt from himself. It could probably be explained away as the after effects of falling off a building that high and surviving without a scratch. He should probably feel lighter than air, stronger than steel, more powerful than

a hurricane. But he didn't, only a meloncholy surreality. As if he were in a dream.

And coincidentally enough, a familiar voice sent ice crackling through his veins.

"Shikamaru...?"

He thought for a second as his heart refused to beat that he actually might *be* dreaming.

But he didn't dream of the city, he never dreamt of falling off ten story buildings, and when he did dream of falling he always woke up just before he hit the ground.

He turned around so slowly that it seemed to last for hours. He didn't want to see the face attached to that voice, he didn't want to beleive he was here, not after he'd finally, *finally* accepted that he wasn't coming back. It couldn't be happening.

Jashin please spare me. Give me a heart attack, strike me with lightning, rip my soul from my body! I don't care what you do to me just get me out of this situation!

Finally their eyes met, and the man took a reluctant step forward, his mouth hanging slightly open as if he wanted to ask a billion things all at once but couldn't find his voice.

Neji.

It was Neji. He was back. He was here... He was real.

"What... what happened to you?" Neji whispered, fear in his eyes. His gaze flicked up and down from the ground to Shikamaru's face to the top of the building.

What happened to me? Shikamaru's fist clenched, the distant feeling dissapearing and that need to hurt something flooding back through him. *You want to know what happened to me?!*

His heart pounded so loudly that he could almost hear it throbbing against his ribcage. He tried to keep taking slow, deep breaths, trying desperately to control the uncharacteristic anger seeping into him.

"How... how did you do that? What were you doing up there?"

Neji. He was real, he was standing there, asking questions as if he had never left. As if he hadn't shattered Shika's heart into a million peices and then ground it to dust and swept it away.

How... how *dare* he. How dare he show his face. How dare he show up now when the Nara had just started healing.

"Kill him." A ghost whispered in his ear. *"Give his soul to Jashin. Let him be judged before a God."*

"Sh..shikamaru?" Neji said, voice hitching. "What's wrong with you?"

Hah! What's wrong with me? What the hell do you think is fucking wrong with me?

He could almost feel the fear radiate off Neji as he grinned and took a step forward.

A feeling of power rushed into him, obliterating his ability to think rationally. He focused chakra into his hand, creating a thin sharp haze to use like a blade.

A very small, almost molecular part of him tugged, trying to reason with himself. *' This is not you, you do not do things like this. You do not feel things like this, especially for Neji of all people.'*

"Please say something, you're scaring me..."

"Kill him now!" The whisper comanded, and he couldn't help but do so.

Neji left him alone. It was his fault. It was all his fault he was like this. now! Shikamaru had tortured himself, taking all the blame for those

six unbearably long months. But it wasn't his fault! He *fixed* everything. He did what he could, he gave everything.

This was Neji's doing.

Neji was the failure. Neji was the screw up. Neji had left and given Jashin the opening for his games. Neji had torn the hole in his heart that Hidan was forcing himself into. It was all him!

And Shikamaru could make him pay. And he would, right here, right now.

A/N- BAAHH! Sorry, lol. This feels short, is it short? I think it is, but seeing as my average chapter is 6000 words and the last THREE have been 8000, I'm gonna end here here at this beautiful little cliffhanger.

MUAHAHAHA!

So, as usuall, review and tell me what you think and whatnot. I'm gonna go sacrifice myself so i can get some god damn rest. I literally feel like I've been running around constantly without a break since... well probably since last Saturday. So like a week and a half.

But yea, thanks for reading, I love you all, forgive the typos and any slashes I missed, (I use those to remind myself to use italics since I can't do it with the writing app I use on my phone. But you've probably already figured that out.)and REVIEW!

Fever pitch

Recurring Nightmares

He took another step, and Neji took one back, his eyes wide. Ohh what Shikamaru would give to know all the thoughts running through his mind.

He was probably thinking it wasn't really him, like Sasuke had done. But Neji knew him better than anyone else, he would assure himself that this was definitely his ex, on the outside, at least.

Of course he was afraid, just look at Shikamaru! He was reaking of power that he'd never seen before, his muscles were actually visible through his clothing, whereas before he'd been more lean and lankey-looking.

He knew his eyes had changed, after getting out of the shower he had studied his reflection for at least ten minutes. Even though he was only in his late twenties, he seemed to have aged backward. He didn't look young, but he noticed a few less worry lines than he'd had, and his crows feet that had more or less become permanent fixtures since Neji's departure weren't to be found.

But the eyes were windows into the soul, and his soul had been burglarized by Jashin and his wicked ways. The harder he fought, the more it seemed his true self was fading away, consumed by the anger and hatred that was so easy to embrace with his newfound power.

So, in a way, it wasn't Shikamaru Nara. And yet no amount of searching elsewhere would find him either.

He was lost within himself and it *felt so good*.

Neji turned on his heel and ran for it then.

Yes, run away. Run like the prey you are.

It only fueled his excitement, like a wolf after his next meal. He pursued not half a second behind him, teeth gritted as his inner beings battled against themselves.

Neji's hair had grown back fast and more silky than ever, it flowed behind him, bouncing and touseling itself in that unique little ponytail as he fled. It wasn't nearly as long as it had been originally, but if Shikamaru reached out, if Neji stumbled for even a trillionth of a second, he could grab it.

But he didn't want to, he was enjoying this, and he heard himself halfway laughing amidst his quick breaths.

He wanted Neji to look back, he wanted to see the fear in him at how utterly close he was to being caught, how close he was to death, this time by his own hands. He knew he wouldn't look back, Neji had the byakugan, he didn't need to turn around to see behind him. A fact that was probably the only thing saving him right now. He was probably well aware of how agonizingly close he was to losing his life.

He wouldn't see it that way, of course. Who ever did? Anyone who was going to die never stopped to think about how it had come about, they never considered their own stupidity as being a factor. It was always someone elses's fault, always.

It didn't matter though, Jashin would judge them, judge *him*, for what he had done. Shikamaru knew it was not his fault, he was doing what he'd been driven to do.

'LISTEN TO YOURSELF!' his own voice pleaded inside his head. 'You've turned into Hidan, you've become everything you hated about him!'

"Shut up!" He growled back aloud, the ferosity in his voice startling him.

Neji, the cunning little bastard, noticed his split second of distraction. Stopping on a dime he twirled gracefully on toe into a palm rotation, and Shikamaru ran right into it.

He smashed against it like a ton of bricks and was knocked backward onto his ass. Neji stared at him for only a heartbeat, his confusion and pain enhanced by the tears streaking his face.

"Sh... shikamaru.." His whimper was barely heard over the rising echo of sirens.

Damn, he forgot about that. There was no way in hell he wouldn't be reported after that little stunt. What kind of excuse was he going to use this time, if he was lucky someone had seen Hidan with him. Surely he had some sort of record...

"I'm... I'm so sorry.." Neji's quiet sob broke him from his thoughts, and as he focused on those beautiful pale waterey eyes, his anger flooded from him like a broken dam. He was cast back into awareness and instantly his body complained of it's recent abuse.

He felt his own eyes tearing up as his actions slammed into him. Oh no.. what had he done?

He loved Neji! He was back! He'd finally come back and he'd attacked him like... like... the the man who drove him away in the first place.

No.. this couldn't... it can't.. he didn't... *he didn't know what to do!*

He wanted to apologize, he wanted to run to him and hug him, risking being bombarded by a defensive Neji.

Oh no.. how could he be here. He couldn't be here right now, he hadn't gotten out of his contract with Jashin yet. Hidan was still.. Oh shit! Hidan!

"Leave!" He shouted to his ex-lover, who looked hurt only for a second before he heard the awareness return to Shikamaru's voice.

'Yes, yes it's me now but I'll explain later!'

"Neji please run away! Do it now!" He pleaded as the brunette started to run to him, relief among many other emotions swirling around in his brilliant eyes. He was overcome with happiness at seeing the real Shikamaru after so long, he knew. The feminine Hyuga may be a genius but he had always been fueled by emotion. But he was in danger, there was no telling whether Hidan was still out for his blood, and not only the albino was a threat. Shikamaru himself could not seem to keep his head on straight, any second he could fall victim to one of his episodes and if Neji's guard was down it would only take a second before the Nara would kill him with his now super-human strength.

"GET THE FUCK OUT OF HERE!" He snarled, stopping the brunette in his tracks.

He had no choice, he could seek Neji out later, He had already had Shika trying to kill him. Seeing Hidan back from the dead would likely be too much for him to handle. Then there would be no explaining. Neji would be so hysterical that he'd probably be taken to a crazy-farm.

Something gleamed from the upper right corner of Shikamaru's vision, and his stomach did a backflip. He scrambled to his feet and started rushing to his ex-lover, he had to protect him. He had to keep him alive to explain.

Oh god but how could he? How could he possibly tell him what happened. He would never see him again, a fact he had come to terms with previously, but now couldn't bear the thought of.

He wasn't fast enough though, and in the blink of an eye Hidan was behind Neji, restraining him with one arm and holding one of those huge stakes to his jugular with the other.

Shikamaru fell to his knees and groaned at the overwhelming desperation that exploded within him. Everything crashed down, all the progress he'd made, all the hope he'd built up, the wounds that had healed were violently ripped open again when he heard his fellow Jashinist mutter into his ex-lovers ear through that grin that suddenly wasn't attractive anymore.

"Hello again, princess. Did you miss me?"

Neji's eyes shifted first into his version of understanding. Shikamaru could practically read his mind through his expression. He was reasoning with himself that Shikamaru had been on that roof in a fight for his life against the zealot, back from the dead to seek revenge. He'd tried to drive Neji away to protect him

Oh Neji, poor, sweet, unsuspecting Neji. If only you knew. If only he could explain, though the spikey haired Jashinist had no idea how he was going to do that if he managed to keep him alive.

Maybe he could have blown it off, maybe he could have just taken care of Hidan and told him a bunch of lies and gotten away from it.

But the understanding in the byakugan activated eyes quickly turned to panic as he came to terms with the fact that Hidan was alive. He was alive and had him by the throat and all he had to do was turn his wrist and sever that crucial artery and Neji was dead. Paralyzed by fear, his ex-lovers eyes pleaded him silently to do something. To once again save him from the brink of death.

Maybe Shikamaru could have gotten away with it. Maybe he could have pushed whatever feelings he'd developed for Hidan to the back of his mind and solved the problem. He might have been able to just do what he should have done in the first place, but in a position as compromising as this, he had only one option. And if it worked than Neji would want a through explanation.

"Let him go Hidan!" He commanded, surprising himself with the confidence in his order.

"I've got him for you pineapple head. Finish him off like the helpless fucking heathen he is."

Shikamaru's chest clenched. Yes, there was no way he could get out of telling the truth now. No matter which option he chose, he was damned.

"Let... him... go." Shikamaru demanded again through clenched teeth. "NOW!" The unspoken threat in his voice would probably be more effective if he wasn't still on his knees, but all his strength was going into trying to seem intimidating right now.

Hidan looked at him sideways, and Shikamaru refused to break eye-contact. He was /not/ afraid of him anymore, Hidan was no longer more powerful than him. He was nothing more than a subordinate now.

Finally grimacing, Hidan lowered the weapon, though he still refused to let the Hyuga go free.

"There was nothing in our deal about not killing *him*."

"You're a fucking idiot if you really think I'd let you! No killing Neji Hyuga! No threatening his life! In fact, when he's around, *you* go find something else to occupy your time! Got it?"

"You can't go fucking making up rules and shit all the time! You're not my fucking master, I serve only Jashin, and he still wants his soul..." Hidan trailed off, pulling a terrified and utterly dumbstruck Neji even closer to him and putting the pike back to his throat.

"He's branded anyway. He's not yours any fucking way that you look at it."

Shit. Now what? Hidan wasn't going to listen. He really had just been going along with it. This had been his plan the whole time.

But... but he'd really thought he cared.. He lost Kakuzu, he'd gone on a rampage.. he'd kissed him and held him and they'd made such intimate passionate love...

It.. no.. Even Hidan had feelings. He felt heartbreak and loneliness just like everyone else.

But, he'd tried to betray Jashin before. He couldn't do it and ended up trying to sacrifice Neji anyway...

Why the hell did the demon God want Neji so fucking bad anyway? Was it the byakugan? Was it just because he was pretty? Was he just like a spoiled child, once he decided he wanted something he went to any lengths to get it?

Jashin just give me a goddamn clue!

Nothing.

Of course.

Dammit Neji! Why the hell did he have to come back!?

Shikamaru was only getting himself in deeper and deeper trouble and now he had to not only watch out for himself but for Neji too. This was too much! No human being alive could be expected to do this!

He was at a complete loss. There was no way out of this, Hidan wouldn't let himself be caught in his shadow possession again, and it wouldn't be fast enough to keep him from slitting Neji's throat anyway.

The sirens suddenly blared back into his thoughts. And he didn't know whether to be comforted or worried. The police couldn't help this situation... all they would do is make it more difficult to think straight and piss Hidan off and make him even less likely to reason with.

"Hidan..." he said, just barely managing to keep the desperation from his voice. "I swear I'll kill you. I'll kill you and you'll be gone for good. There'll be no one to dig you up this time."

Hidan's face went blank, and a flicker of hope gave Shikamaru a small dose of confidence. Enough to push him to his feet and let his hands haze over threateningly.

"I'm all you have left." Again he mentally punched himself. He was digging himself a deeper and deeper grave with every word he let Neji hear. But it was the only upperhand that he had.

"Jashinists... never break their word." He forced out. Even if Neji misunderstood, it wouldn't matter now. He might as well just let go of the thought that he would stay. There was no reason to cling to such a notion. There was no way in hell the Hyuga would forgive him this time, no matter what facts he pointed out, no matter how he pleaded or reasoned.

"Damn yoouu!" Hidan growled, suddenly throwing Neji to the side with a yelp. "Who the fucking hell do you think you are!?" He shouted, his violent eyes nearly ablaze.

Oh shit. He probably should have known Kakuzu's death was a sensitive topic. But at least it had the desired effect. Neji was safe, if he had any brains at all, he'd run away while Shikamaru distracted his potential murderer.

He could halfway understand his rage, chances are Hidan had come to think of the Nara as a comrade, and possibly had started trusting him as more than that too. And Shikamaru was dismayed to find out that it hurt him to see Hidan look so betrayed. It's not as if the psycho hadn't grown on him too.

"EVERYONE FREEZE!" A stranger's voice barked over an intercom.

Damn it all, now he had to distract Hidan from Neji and innocent police officers just trying to do their job.

"HANDS IN THE AIR! "

"SHUT THE HELL UP!" Hidan roared, taking off like a bullet toward the officer. Luckily enough for them they were more or less behind Shikamaru, and he was able to jump in the way and after a few punches and blocks, expertly maneuvered the weapon away from Hidan and kicked him back in the direction he came from.

Simultaneously He pulled out his wallet and tossed it behind him to the officer, scanned the area for Neji and said a silent thank-you prayer when he didn't find him. He wasn't writhing in unidentifiable pain, so Jashin must not be too awefully pissed.

A random thought occurred to him and he reached into his rear pocket opposite the one he had his wallet in.

HOLY SHIT! *Oh Jashin or God or whoever the hell was out there, thank you! Thankyouthankyouthankyou.*

"This sitaution is being handled! Please don't interfere!" He shouted behind him to the officers, gone quiet while they most likley checked his I.D. and Jutsu permit.

Surely they'd let him off the hook, they witnessed with their own eyes him defending them against Hidan.

He pulled the small metal ring from his pocket. Whether it be coincidence or Jashin's grace, he had slipped on the pair of pants he'd been wearing when Itachi had given it to him. The pants he'd deemed as 'clean enough' seeing as they'd missed most of the damage from his and Hidans little fling when they had been removed and tossed aside. Something he still didn't understand, seeing as they'd been rolling around in flesh blood...

Bah, he'd just let it go as Jashin's plan. So what? He couldn't think about it right now, Hidan was pissed enough to start killing left and right and he needed to get him under control, and with the miniscule

chance that Neji might still be watching, tackling him and kissing him into submission wasn't an option.

Shikamaru blinked, the fact that that idea had come up at all was somewhere between hilarious and troublesome.

He slid the ring onto his finger and channeled chakra into it, but having to cut it off almost immediately to focus on blocking another charge from Hidan and knock him back again. He was back in an instant, snarling, and Shikamaru swung the pike at him, forcing the silver hair to jump back to evade.

The zealot was in a blind fury now, he wasn't going to stop until he was restrained or he tasted someones blood.

He channeled chakra into the ring again.

"Hey!" He shouted into it, and jerked in surprise as Itachi's voice suddenly invaded his head.

"You don't need to yell, I'm going to be fighting a headache all night now."

Shikamaru gave an apologetic smile as he once again deflected an attack from a thankfully weaponless Hidan. And then he felt stupid, Itachi couldn't see him.

"Sorry. But I really need some help right now. Hidan's trying to go on a rampage, there's people all around and I can't protect them and figure out a way to trick him into my Shadow Possession at the same time!"

"Why is he upset?"

"It's really too much to summarize for you. Just follow the sirens!"

Shikamaru let his hand fall away. The Uchiha definitely didn't sound happy. Then again, he rarely did.

He lunged at Hidan to tackle him and only halfway succeeded. In fact he'd blundered horribly.

Hidan saw him coming, and when they collided he'd dropped to his back and rolled, using Shikamaru's momentum against him to throw him backward with his feet.

He was up and charging for the officer making handsigns in an instant, and though Shikamaru was close behind, the zealot was just out of reach.

"SAY YOUR PRAYERS FUCKERS!" Hidan howled, his hand glowing a dark red and forming into a blade.

Shika's eyes widened.

No way! Hidan was using his attack! The one he didn't even know about until his uncharacteristic pursuit of Sasuke. There was no doubt that he could use jutsu now, but /how?/ Neji had said his chakra seemed strange, but at the funeral he had contributed it to his lack of being able to perform the sacrifices he needed to stay alive. But now, what with the clones and this jutsu, it was almost as if...

As if he had Shikamaru's abilities...

Maybe... Maybe it was Jashin's powers, he hadn't even known how to do it until he'd basically pledged himself to the demon god.

Or maybe it was just something the priest was capable of. He had no idea what Kakuzu's abilities had been, maybe he'd not had anything for Hidan to mimic.

He wasn't going to be able to stop him, he was charging after him in a dead sprint, and now that he was attacking the man seemed to move even faster.

Shit, he couldn't let him taste that officer's blood, but there was no possible way to stop him in time. Even his shadows couldn't move

fast enough, seeing as he had to stop and say the invocation word. Just in that split seconds time the zealot would have been able to cut the man's head clean off.

Then, as if his prayers were answered, a blur raced down seemingly out of nowhere in front of Hidan. In what couldn't even be measured in any manner of time the silver haired man's glowing arm was grabbed and twisted behind him into a submissive hold, and he roared in anger while falling to his knees.

The one man calvary, Itachi Uchiha, had made it with not a single second to spare, and was restraining Hidan with one hand, emotionless as ever.

His eyes flicked up to the stunned officer, sharingan blazing.

"I suggest you and your men leave the premises before any casualties occur. You are outclassed here and the problem has now been dealt with."

"Goddammit red-eyes! Fuck off that man was Jashin's next meal!"

Shikamaru skidded to a stop beside Itachi, panting. His next meal?

Whoa, wait a second. Jashin *ate* the souls sacrificed to him?

"Shikamaru.." Itachi said, only the slightest wrinkle on his brow giving away his anger. "I expect an explanation after this."

"Yeah... no problem..." The Nara wheezed. He had a few questions to ask himself...

"YOU!" Hidan raged, thrashing violently but unable to break the Uchiha's grip. "Consider yourself DEAD you pineapple headed fuck! How *dare* you betray Jashin will!"

"Hidan..." Shikamaru said softly, angry at himself for feeling so guilty all the sudden. "You can't really have expected me to just watch while you kill Neji."

"Why the hell not!? You were about to do it anyway!" He shouted back.

"So that's what's going on here?" Itachi said, one admittedly perfect brow raised.

"Sort of.." Shikamaru sighed. Everything was okay now. The policemen had heeded Itachi's warning and were slowly leaving, having left Shika's wallet on the ground for fear of intervening to hand it to him personally.

He made his way over to the discarded chunk of leather and retrieved it.

"Thank you..." He said to Itachi, thoroughly exhausted. Really, from sparring with Hidan to falling off a building to chasing Neji to all the other utter bullshit that had gone down, his chakra was just about exhausted and he had aches and pains in places he didn't even know he had muscles. He knew he'd be better by tomorrow, but the mental exhaustion was something even Jashin couldn't relieve.

And he still had quite a bit of explaining to do.

Damn, he *really* hoped Neji would wait a few days to make another appearance.

"You're welcome." Itachi replied flatly. "I will help you remove him from the public eye, and then I'd like to be filled in."

He looked down to Hidan as he spoke, who had given up his struggle and was resting his weight on his free hand, breathing heavily. He didn't respond, and Shikamaru could only assume that he was just as worn out as himself.

"Yeah, We can go back to my apartment."

Hidan lifted his head just enough to meet the Nara's eyes, and he begged silently to remain silent and just agree with whatever he told

the elder Uchiha. Surely Hidan was just as disinclined to share his sex life with Itachi as he was to share it with Shikamaru.

"I'm sure I'm going to have to fill out a report tomorrow." He sighed, scratching the back of his neck. Itachi remained silent, and it briefly occurred to Shikamaru that he probably knew how to evade the system, he made a mental note to ask about that.

"You okay now?" He asked Hidan, who yanked his arm from his captors loosened grip and stood, rubbing his wrist. Shikamaru just rolled his eyes when he replied with a glare, oh well, he could throw his tantrum. Shikamaru would never regret saving Neji, not before, and not now.

"So Neji has returned, and I'm taking it that you were not expecting it." Itachi started in immediately after shutting the door behind him.

"Yeah.." Shikamaru said, falling into his chair like a rag doll and reaching for a cigarette.

"That explains Hidan's actions. But not the crater outside your apartment complex."

"If you want every detail then you might as well make yourself comfortable..." Shikamaru mumbled through lighting his cancer stick. Honestly, he was so over this. No, he still didn't want Itachi to know every aspect of the situation, but once again the man had appeared more-or-less out of the blue to pull his ass out of deep water. If he wanted to know, he would tell him. He wasn't going to just blurt it out, but if the elder Uchiha caught on... so be it.

"I don't intend to stay that long. You two are not my only priorities. Just tell me the basics."

"It's none of your damn business anyway Red-eyes!"

"Every time you get yourself into trouble is most certainly my business, especially when I'm called in to control you."

"Tch. You're not my mommy Uchiha. I can take care of my fucking self."

"Hidan!" Itachi snapped, the small escape of emotion made both Jashinists twitch in surprise. "Nagato has had enough of your temper tantrums. I am the only thing stopping him from coming after you himself right now. "

Hidan snorted and crossed his arms, and Shikamaru had to hold back his smirk as he imagined him with his lower lip in a pout.

"I'm not fucking afraid of him."

Itachi continued after taking a slow breath, his gaze flicking to Shikamaru for only a moment. "It's been a year Hidan..." he said softly, and the albinos death glare was instantly on the Uchiha, who was unaffected.

"You need to try to move on..."

Hidan's eyes narrowed and the two glared at each other. Hidan had to be aware that Shikamaru knew of Kakuzu's fate after that little fiasco. He wasn't sure if he just didn't want to talk about it in general or just not in front of his cult partner.

"Don't fucking act like you still know me, Uchiha." Hidan said in a growl so low that Shika could barely hear it.

"You can run your brother's life but keep your fucking nose out of mine."

"Do not bring Sasuke into this simply to aggravate me." Itachi said calmly. "I would be more than happy to stay out of your life if you would stop dragging me back into it. Which is it Hidan? Do you want

me to help you or to leave you alone? I'm getting sick of these childish games."

Shikamaru's head felt as if he were watching a ping-pong tournament. Did they really have to get into these squabbles with him here? He felt like he was intruding on something.

Hidan continued to glare at Itachi, who had just the slightest smugness in his stance.

"I'm not a fool. I know what's going on here, and regardless of your religion you cannot just go around killing people who get in the way of what you want. Shikamaru is not an object, his past still needs dealt with. If you want him then you're going to have to help him, not make his decision even harder."

"Uhhh..." Shikamaru gaped, and his guests' eyes both landed on him. How the hell had this conversation ended up here!? And what the fuck? He actually *did* know!

Itachi did his equivalent of an eye roll. "Neither of your love lives are my concern, you can stop being so embarrassed."

"How-"

"Hidan was using abilities that he is not capable of without a willing Jashinist partner to leech off of. "

"Hey! I'm not fucking *leeching* anything!"

"Shut up Hidan."

The priest stood up then. "Why don't *you* shut the hell up. I'm about sick of you gossiping about me to the whole fucking world. If I want pineapple head to know my goddamn life story then *I'll* be the fucker to explain it to him."

Itachi stared blankly, and Hidan turned to Shikamaru.

"And you need to quit fucking acting like a victim all the damn time. You know why your life is so shitty? Cuz' *you* fucking make it that way! You want your boytoy back? GO FUCKING GET HIM! But don't fucking commit to getting over him and expect me to be over-fucking-joyed when you suddenly stab me in the back and decide 'you still have feelings for him'" He said the last in a mocking voice. "I'm not fucking here because I want to be you stupid pineapple headed fuck. Maybe I was but I'm fucking sick of your shit. If you ever, EVER fucking threaten me again..." Hidan paused, grinding his teeth. "You don't even wanna know what I'll fucking do to you."

With that he turned and stormed from the room, slamming the apartment door shut behind him so hard that Shikamaru thought for a moment that it might fall right off it's hinges.

Hey... at least he used the door.

Shikamaru stared after him, mouth hanging open and disbelief plastered all over his face.

"The enigma known as Hidan..." Itachi said quietly.

Shikamaru flopped back again, grabbing the sides of his head with both hands. "I'm going to lose my mind."

Itachi allowed a small smirk at this. "I think he really likes you."

Shikamaru almost choked, gaping at his remaining guest incredulously. "How the hell do you get affection from *that* !?"

"Because, you're still alive." Itachi said almost casually, finally seating himself. "Care to tell me how you managed to get him so riled up?"

"Me?" Shikamaru scoffed. Hidan had been calm until Itachi had started in on him.

"Yes, you asked for assistance to control him remember?"

Oh, right. "Well. Uh... he.." Shikamaru flicked his ashes and took another drag while Itachi waited with a bored expression.

"You had sex."

Shikamaru felt like his entire body turned red. Did he have to say it like that? That wasn't even really an important part of this! This was weird, talking to Itachi like they were best friends. Actually... it felt more like he was talking to a therapist. The sharingan user seriously needed to figure out how to relax.

Itachi gave an irritated sigh. "I told you already that there's no need for your humiliation. I honestly don't want to know the details, so skip that part, if you would."

Shikamaru cleared his throat. Yeah, he wouldn't argue with that. "Well, I don't really know what the hell he was doing, flirting or just trying to aggravate me, but he stole all of my hairbands, even the one I was using. I chased after him to get it back and we ended up having a sparring match on the roof and..."

"And...?" Itachi drawled.

And what? He'd had an *episode*?

"Something happened, like... I don't know what it even was. It's like there was someone else in my head with me, like I was two different people but with only one body..."

Itachi's brow furrowed slightly at this, but he remained quiet, waiting for Shikamaru to explain further.

"I remember thinking... that I could sacrifice Hidan. And he saw what I was doing and tried to stop me. I tried to stop myself even but it was as if I were just standing back watching it all happen. I had no control."

Hidan tackled me to make me stop and we ended up going over the edge."

"And that's why the street is destroyed." Itachi said calmly. "But when did Neji Hyuga show up."

"Right after I landed. Well I guess he had to have been there when it happened, but that's when I noticed him. In fact I think Hidan knew he was here before I did."

"Most likely." Itachi answered, "And he saw Hidan and tried to make a run for it and you stopped him, and that set him off."

"Well, I don't think me stopping him was the whole reason."

A single brow raised in question.

"When I saw Neji, I got angry. I don't even know why. I had this overwhelming urge to kill him, and I swear to my grandma's grave I heard someone whisper in my ear..."

"*You* tried to kill Hyuga?" Itachi said, unable to keep all the disbelief from his voice. Shikamaru only averted his gaze in response. He was ashamed to say it, and honestly he didn't even know why he was sharing all this with Itachi. He could have just stuck with the 'Hidan wanted to kill him and Shikamaru stopped him' story. But the look of betrayal in the zealot's eyes had stung him, and he wasn't completely sure why it affected him so.

"I don't know what came over me..."

"You are a Jashinist, Shikamaru." Itachi suddenly said just a little condescending. "It happened before also, I believe, when you decided to attack my brother for no reason."

Shikamaru cringed at this nodded, he'd almost forgotten about that.

"The religion is based on chaos. The best way to create chaos is to make impulsive decisions without logic. It is Jashin playing at your

weaknesses as a human being. He used your anger at Neji for his own devices."

"But..." Shikamaru studded, he had felt possessed almost, but he hadn't thought that would really be an accurate description.

"Why do you think Hidan is the way he is?" Itachi said, and the Nara hesitated. Everything was starting to add up, well, sort of...

Jashin had taken Neji and used him against Shikamaru. The nightmares, they were stepping stones to torture him to the point where he would accept any kind of comfort he could. Jashin provided him with Hidan, who only helped it along by tricking himself into voluntarily giving Jashin control. Hidan succeeded in pulling him from his depression, which made Shikamaru less inclined to believe the false things in his dream, and in fact turned it around into anger, anger directed at Neji. Sasuke had been merely a test, or he assumed so. The demon of a God probably wouldn't object to munching on the soul of the younger Uchiha if he could get it.

When Neji came back, that had been the real attempt.

But the question still remained of why everything was centered around his ex. Was it really all just a ploy to reap the soul he had missed out on when Hidan had failed?

Was Kakuzu's death some sort of punishment? Or was it a driving force to trick Hidan into seeking out Shikamaru, thinking it was his idea? Or maybe even both?

"Jashin has a plan for you." He had said...

Finally, some sense was being made! Even though it was bad news, Shikamaru couldn't help but be somewhat relieved.

But there were some things that still weren't solved.

"You think Hidan actually likes me?" He asked, wanting to slap himself for sounding like a teenage girl again.

Itachi seemed to think the same thing as he seemed to hold back a smile. "It seems so to me, yes."

That didn't make sense. Surely Jashin couldn't force affection like that... Maybe he could provide the circumstances for it to develop.. Maybe he was just a really good manipulator. But how could a god so cruel as to somehow kill the man Hidan loved, want to make him fall for Shikamaru?

What the hell was the goal here?

He growled out loud in his frustration. And he swore he saw Itachi smirk, this only irritated him more.

"Am I making this situation more complicated than it is or is it seriously this fucked?"

Itachi only stared at him blankly before his eyes flicked down to the ring on Shikamaru's finger. "I'll be in touch if you should figure it out." With that statement he poofed into a bunch of crows that swooped out the window, And Shikamaru was finally alone.

"You know what?" He said, yanking himself to his feet. "Fuck this. Screw this whole situation. I'm done with it."

He made up his mind, he would 'break-up' or whatever the hell, with Hidan and tell him to get lost. If he got pissed and wanted to fight, oh well. He'd use Jashin's power to slay him and then he would go soak himself in fucking holywater for a week and tell Jashin to go fuck himself too.

And he'd get back with Neji and go back to how it should be. And if Neji wanted no part of him, he'd drink himself into a stupor and... well... he'd cross that bridge when he came to it.

He was done. He wanted out. He didn't even like Hidan, and Hidan probably didn't like him. It was all a giant scheme by Jashin...

Hidans lips brushing against his. Rough hands tangled in his hair and running down his back. Solid muscle hidden under soft pearly skin. The unexplainable satisfaction at how right it felt to feel something so wrong.

Shikamaru blinked the image away.. he... he had to beleive it wasn't real. His chest clenched painfully at the thought, but he had to beleive it. He could use it if he needed to kill the priest. Use the side effects of being a Jashinist to help him break free of this curse.

It was lust. They were both lonley and sad and when they found comfort in each other it blossomed into lust. But that's the only four letter L-word it was.

He loved Neji. He knew he did... You don't just fall out of love. It was forever... wasn't it?

He missed Neji, he knew. But that last nightmare, he had accepted Hidan and rejected his ex...

But that had been a manipulation too... hadn't it?

DAMMIT! How could he make choices when he didn't know what was real or not! It was no fucking wonder Hidan was insane! No wonder he pretended to be a moron! Trying to figure this out was excruciating.

Realizing he had meandered into his bedroom, he let himself collapse onto the bed, stretching out on his stomache and resting his head on crossed arms.

His eyes slid shut, feeling as if he had bricks tied to his eyelashes.

This had skyrocketed past troublesome and crashlanded on planet bullshit.

He smiled, he was even starting to sound like Hidan in his thoughts.

A/N- Okay, uugh. I'm probably seriously going to wait and rest awhile before trying to do another chapter, seeing as it's the weekend. I'm so terribly, *terribly* tired, I can't even write, I had to delete a large portion of this chapter like twice because I went off on some tangent that pretty much didn't even make sense.

Hopefully I got it right now, and it makes sense. If not I suppose I'll have to sacrifice myself.

Anyway, All I have to say regarding this chappie is Don't be mad at Neji. In case you didn't understand, basically Shikamaru's nightmares were Jashin's doing. The real Neji really had nothing to do with them.

There's going to be lots of drama-ey goodness in the next chap, so.. uhm..

I don't even remember what I was gonna say...

REVIEW!

Revelations

Recurring Nightmares

Neji stared at the doorknob, his hand outstretched to grab it. His hand was shaking, his legs felt like jelly, he was barely managing to keep himself from bursting into tears.

Honestly he was surprised he'd even made it this far, he had pretty well convinced himself that there was no way in hell he could do this, not after finding out what Shikamaru had been up to. Or at least finding out little bits and pieces of it and trying to link it all together.

He couldn't do it though, he wasn't his ex, and he lacked his ability to put peices together the way he could. Unless everything was outright explained, he didn't know if he'd understand.

He may not understand regardless.

But he owed it to Shikamaru, he had done a terrible, terrible thing, and had given up the one stable thing in his life that made it worth living anymore. He had sabotaged himself in leaving the Nara, doomed himself to be overwhelmed by his own thoughts and fears with no one to turn to to ask for help. With no one to hold him and tell him it would be alright, no one to assure him that No, he *wasn't* crazy.

He had left *himself* all alone in the world.

He took another deep breath and clenched his eyes shut. He willed himself to open the door, he imagined himself doing it, he gritted his teeth and *comanded* in his mind that his body do what he was telling it to.

But he didn't. He... he just couldn't.

Fine then. He thought, releasing the air from his lungs. *Just knock. Knock really quietly so there's no way he will hear and then you can leave.*

Yes, that would be okay. He could just take that one tiny step, and then use that to build himself up to return some other time. When his heart wasn't about to erupt from his ribcage and his body wasn't about to drown him in sweat.

But... but what if he answered?

Oh fucking hell he couldn't do this...

His hand fell limply to his side and he closed his eyes again.

Coward.

You're such a coward.

He was. He always had been, and he still was, possibly even more so. He knew that when he pushed all the nonsense aside, everything had been his fault. Everything could have been fine, if he had just stood against his fears and trusted Shikamaru. If he had let Hidan in when he knocked, if he had let them become friends, then they would still be in their house together. Hell, maybe he could have learned to be friends with the crazy neighbors too..

I'm only human. It's not my fault. It's not anyone's fault.

Right, right, don't talk yourself down Neji... Remember what Kakashi had said in therapy. You are being your own worst enemy. Once you have gotten yourself on your own team, then you can heal.

I'm just a person, a normal person who acted as any normal person would. Don't dwell on what cannot be fixed.

Again he inhaled sharply and forced his hand into a fist. He could do it, he was going to do it! Just knock! Don't even think about it, just do it.

There it was, it was moving toward the door! So close, he was so fucking close!

Three almost inaudible taps seemed to thunder in his own ears, and he swallowed heavily as he used every ounce of strength he had to keep his feet rooted on the floor. If he moved at all, he was going to run.

No more running.

Five seconds went by. The longest five seconds ever in existence. He felt his body start to weaken, it was shaking so badly he could hardly stand. He was getting dizzy from holding his breath, but if he didn't then he would run. He had to wait, he had to make the effort.

Ten seconds. Jesus Christ could time go any slower? There was still no answer, no sound behind the closed door. He stared at the number, 420. He almost smiled as the memory of them moving in faintly replayed in his head. It had been so ridiculous, the receptionist had told them the number, handed them the keys, and still it wasn't until they got to the door that he could figure out why Shikamaru kept chuckling.

Neji hadn't thought it to be so funny, it was as if Karma were dangling the reminders in front of him... He'd only rolled his eyes and went inside.

He resisted the tears pooling just behind his eyes. He had been so cruel to Shikamaru. His lover had tried so hard, and he knew that he had. But he just.. he'd shut down. He couldn't do it.

"Neji... I.. I love you.." Shika'd said hesitantly, just before the brunette was about to doze off.

"Yeah.. you too.." He'd said back, fighting the urge to get out of bed and move to the couch.

God, why had he been so angry, so scared, so confused? Everything had been fine, they had been doing better than expected, but he still couldn't get it out of his head...

One minute.

Okay, one minute was enough. He'd knocked and waited and now he could leave. He turned around and slapped the button for the elevator, practically jogging in place as he urged the inanimate machine to hurry the hell up and get him out of this place. He hated waiting on the stupid elevator, he hated it more when there were other people in there. Stupid useless hunk of crap, it was meant for lazy people, lazy people who didn't mind ignoring others or doing the exact opposite, which was even less preferable. At least that was one opinion he and his ex-lover had shared, they both preferred the stairs 100 to 1.

And that was exactly why he was taking the elevator.

Finally he heard the mechanical whirring and thunking, and the little bell dinged as the doors opened. He sighed heavily and lifted his foot to take a step when he froze.

Son of a bitch.

Apparently his ex had come to the same conclusion of taking the elevator. Because there he stood, with grocery bags littered around his feet.

His heart plummeted for only a second before it launched up again into his throat like a bungee jumper. He stared straight into the Nara's dark eyes, his surprised eyes, scared eyes. It was Shikamaru this time, not whatever monster he had come across before, whatever unholy demon had possessed his body and made him jump off a roof and somehow survive without the slightest casualty.

He knew that it was him. He looked tired, as he always had. Like he had far too much on his shoulders and no where to unload it. The

other Shikamaru had been completely different, though there really was nothing to outwardly express the difference. He was overflowing with malice and this foreboding sense of darkness, when he'd seen Neji.. Ugh, he didn't even want to think about it.

Shikamaru had wanted to kill him. He knew it, without a doubt. The way his usual warm, calculating eyes had been so hard and unreadable. He'd stared at him so emotionlessly. Shikamaru was never blank like that, sure, he always looked bored to death, but not blank.

That... *that* was why he had to talk to him now. Why he had to force the lump in his throat down and say something, *anything*. He had to find out what happened, find out what he'd done to himself, what *Neji* had caused in his leaving. Neji only prayed silently to any God that was out there, to the universe, and to Karma combined that his leaving did not break some all-important thread that was attaching Shikamaru to his sanity.

He could not live with himself if he did. He could not and he *would not*.

"Hey.." Shikamaru finally said. With that small sound Neji could no longer hold back his tears. He hated himself for it and he was very close to just punching himself in the face, but he couldn't stop them. It felt so good to hear his voice, the day before last didn't count. The only thing he'd said toward Neji was telling him to leave. And that was not something he wanted to hear, no matter the circumstances. Aside from that he'd only been talking to Hidan.

And the realization that fell over Shikamaru's face as he recognized the fact that Neji was about to cry only made it even harder to stop the downpour. He nodded toward the apartment and gathered his groceries.

"It's unlocked."

Neji whirled around and nearly kicked in the door with his need to get out of this hallway where anyone would walk by and see him breaking down like a little girl. The fact that Shikamaru should not have his door unlocked in a city like this only registered for a second before he chased it away. It would be best not to start out what was likely going to be a bad chat with nagging.

He made it about halfway into the livingroom before he had to stop and close his eyes, taking slow, deep breaths to stop the tears.

It was so bare.. Shikamaru had not even bothered to redecorate, not that he honestly expected him too. There really was nothing in here except the few bits of furniture that had still been here the day he'd left.

It hadn't changed at all, and this fact left Neji feeling even lower than usual.

Shikamaru silently went past him and set the crinkling bags on the floor of the kitchenette, and then walked out just to the point where he could see Neji. He pulled out a cigarette and lit it, taking a long drag before he just stared at him.

He wasn't mad, Neji knew he wasn't mad. And this made his heart ache. He had left him with nothing but a note for 6 months, Shikamaru had to have gone through hell. And yet he... he looked better than ever. In everything but his eyes.

God, he looked like he'd been tortured.

"This is awkward.." The Nara finally said. And Neji felt tears drip down his cheek through his uncomfortable smile.

"I'm sorry." He said, mad at himself for not sounding sorry at all. Shikamaru opened his mouth to say something but Neji put up his hand. He had to get it out before he started blubbering so bad that he couldn't form actual words.

"I'm.. I'm so sorry Shikamaru. Leaving... like I did was horrible. I'm not going to make excuses, it was a cowardly thing for me to do, especially the way I went about it. I just... I didn't know what else to do. I was so confused, I kept having nightmares, I'd have these visions while I was awake.. Everytime I looked at the window or held a knife I just wanted to..." He looked up, sniffing, feeling his heart break at Shikamaru's expression. "I wanted to hurt myself, I wanted to kill myself. Even though I *knew* Shikamaru, I knew that he was gone, I knew that everything was fine, I knew you loved me and I knew in my heart that I didn't want to die... I couldn't stop it. I was scared.. I was so scared..."

He took a moment to take a breath, and absently shifted just a centimeter closer to his ex.

"I didn't want you to come home... and.." He took a deep breath, but the rest came out in a series of sobs anyway. "And find me in a puddle of my own blood. I couldn't stand the thought of you finding out I committed suicide. And even moreso, I couldn't stand the thought of you taking all the blame onto yourself. I... I would rather you hate me for being a selfish son of a bitch than hate yourself for something that wasn't your fault..."

"Please stop..." Shikamaru said quietly, And Neji did his best to hold back the sobs, hurt that his ex was still standing so far away, as if afraid to come closer, but understanding at the same time.

He stared at him, trying so desperately to get control of himself. God Shikamaru must think so little of him right now. Just look at him! He looked so amazing, God he was ripped. He was obviously leaps and bounds stronger than he'd ever been, some little pipsqueak could never cause the damage that he'd done while trying to stop himself from turning to human pudding. Hell, Neji had nearly accepted death again when he'd been pursued by his possessed ex-lover.

"Neji.." Shikamaru broke him from his thoughts. He should be happy to hear his name from those lips. He should be consoled, but it was

not a good sound. It was not an I'm-happy-to-see you sound, though it wasn't the opposite either.

"I understand... I wasn't ever mad at you. I never hated you..."

Neji wanted to interrupt him with his questions. He wanted to ask him how that could be possible. How he could attack him like that and claim to have never been upset.

Shikamaru sighed and rubbed the back of his neck with his cigarette-free hand. "Well.. I guess that's not entirely true. But.. It's.. it's such a long troublesome story.."

"I have time.." Neji said meekly, and Shikamaru only looked at him as if he'd wanted him to say the opposite.

"I really don't know if that's true though.."

"Shikamaru.."

"Look, Neji. I'm.. I'm really really sorry but I have a hell of a lot on my hands right now. More than I can explain... I just don't know if I could handle your reaction.."

Neji felt his brows arc. His reaction? His reaction to what?

Oh.. Oh yes. The *psycho* .

He took a deep breath to control the small spark of anger. He could not get mad right now, it was not an option. That would not progress anything, and would probably send them spiraling into a fight.

"I'm obviously well-aware that the psycho is back..." Neji started, and Shikamaru was suddenly pushing past him. He stared at him incredulously as he quickly shut the window, locked it, and drew the blind, then moved to the door and locked both the deadbolt and the knob lock. After that he made a beeline into the bedroom, probably checking the window.

When he finally returned he took a stance so close to Neji that chills ran down his spine. It was still Shikamaru... but it was like a Shikamaru from his dreams..

He blinked away the thought, this was absolutely no time for that.

"It's so much more complicated than that Neji.." Shikamaru said quietly, not quite looking into the Hyuga's eyes. "I... I really want to explain. I want to tell you more than anything, but.."

"But... what?"

Shikamaru ran a hand down his face and then suddenly spun around, pacing up and down the hall. Neji just stared in confusion. Was he mad? What the hell had happened? He really had never seen the spikey haired man so troubled. Well, he was always troubled by one thought or another, but to see him so calmly disturbed by this.

Neji really couldn't even imagine what would be causing this action out of the easy-going man.

"Just... start with Hidan.." Neji said, wanting to go wash his mouth out after saying the piece of shit's name. That was what he was most curious about anyway. What kind of relationship did he have with the man, thinking he could order him around like that? Shikamaru wasn't stupid enough to try to force the zealot to go against his fucked up God unless there was a damn good reason behind it.

"That's the most complicated part..." He muttered, coming back and suddenly wrapping his arms so tightly around Neji that the air in his lungs whoosed out. "I'm happy to see you..." He breathed. "I really am, I spent so long wanting this day to come... but really.. you could not have shown up at a worse fucking time.."

Neji wiggled free and grabbed him by the shoulders, it took just about all of his strength not to just lean forward and kiss him. But it was inappropriate, it was far too soon. He couldn't expect some sort

of romantic welcome-back, this was real life, not some movie. They had both apparently gone through hell and back.

"Please tell me what's going on..." He pleaded, fighting tears again at the utterly hopeless look in Shikamaru's eyes. They shifted down to rest only briefly on Neji's lips, and his heart fluttered until they went lower still, and then sharpened as they focused onto something.

Neji dropped his hands, instinctively holding them over his throat and taking a step back.

"What is that." Shikamaru said robotically. It wasn't even a question he asked as he stepped back up again and grabbed Neji's wrist to pull it away.

His breath hitched as his ex brushed his hair away and leaned in closer, and the tears started welling up again as he stepped back to take a deep breath, and roll his sleeves up, letting the tears free in silence.

There was no use of hiding it, he'd seen it now, and he would end up finding out. He couldn't hide things from Shikamaru, not even if he put every ounce of wit and strength and determination he had into it. He didn't want him to know, he didn't want to explain, but if He expected as much from his ex, then he had to be willing to talk about the dark truths as well...

He shifted his gaze upward and latched onto the ceiling fan while Shikamaru's hands gingerly ran down the abused skin of his arms. They were rough.. his hands never used to be so rough..

He hiccuped once and then let out a single sob when he felt his ex's grip tighten. His chin was grabbed firmly and pulled down, forcing him to meet the Nara's eyes.

"Who did this to you?" He almost growled, and Neji crumpled within himself as he looked down to his skin. It was marred on every inch by scars. Wounds that had been deep, but not deep enough to kill

him. Some were so small and thin that they were hardly noticeable, others looked as if someone had taken a hacksaw to him. On his left inner arm the word 'Coward' was carved into him, easily readable as only recently healed scar tissue. It had been the last cut he'd made into himself...

"I did.." Neji whispered, unable to put any more effort into his voice.

And he broke down, he couldn't do it, and he let himself. His sobs grew in volume and became uncontrollable, and without even realizing it until it was already done he threw his arms around Shikamaru's neck and let his legs fall out from under him.

He buried his face in his old lover's new, chisled chest. Relishing in it but also letting him feel the stab of guilt it brought.

He deserved it, he deserved all of it, all of the pain, all of the sadness, all of the blame.

So what if he was his own worst enemy? So what if he was only breaking himself down? He had fucked up so utterly bad that there was no way it could be fixed. He'd made a terrible situation even worse by letting himself give up, by giving into the strange voices he heard, letting them guide his actions, letting them feed on the hatred and depression he felt.

He was so weak, he was a coward.

Not like Shikamaru, he had turned it to something good, he'd improved himself, he'd used it as fuel to turn a bad situation into a good one. Look at him.. He was so put together, there was something definitely wrong with him, but he had not lost it. Not like Neji.

There were days, even weeks that he couldn't remember. When he woke up with some sort of object in his hand, stained with blood. His skin would burn and it would hurt but he would go to the mirror and

observe it and be unable to think anything more than *Good. That's what you get.*

"Neji.." Shikamaru said, the disbelief in his tone only barely overpowering the choked sound of being on the verge of tears.

"I'm sorry!" Neji sobbed uncontrollably, "It... it was so bad Shikamaru!" He didn't want to talk about this, he didn't want him to know. Because it wasn't about him, it was not Shikamaru's job to worry about him, and he did not want him to put this on his shoulders.

"They would tell me things, little ghosts whispering in my ears. They were always there but I couldn't see them. 'You're going to die..' They kept saying. 'You're going to die no matter what so you might as well accept it.'" He forced himself to take in a breath only for it to come whooshing right back out. "I hated myself. I wasn't strong enough to protect myself, I had to rely on you. I put that burden on your shoulders and thought nothing of it. I blamed you when there wasn't anything you could have done. I said such horrible mean things, I treated you like shit. But you were the only person that I *shouldn't* have been angry with!"

Shikamaru took a deep breath above him and let it out slowly. Damn, he better not be sitting there smoking right now. This was important!

Ah, no, he was doing it again. Dammit, there was no reason for anger.

"Even though every odd was against you, even with the weight of my life completely in your hands, you pulled it off. You still saved me in the end, you put that psycho in the ground, you fixed us up with a new home, you got a new job, you did everything right. And I still made you feel like shit for it..." He leaned back a little bit to wipe his eyes, and Shikamaru looked down at him with pain etched in every feature.

"I... I gave up. You refused to give up on me, but I gave up... That's why.. That's why I thought you attacked me. You gave me everything and I spat it back in your face... Shikamaru, I would have let you kill me..."

His ex jerked at that, his eyes going wide and his body stiff as if someone had just stabbed him.

"I.. I would have let you. Except I knew.. I knew you wouldn't. I know you.. and.. that wasn't you Shika..." He pushed off even more to stand of his own power, and looked at Shikamaru, still struggling to stop the tears. "I did this, to myself. I don't know why.. I don't really even know how. It was as if wasn't in my own body, like I was in a dream. And I didn't fight it because I was so convinced it was a dream, that I would wake up and be fine. It... it didn't even hurt until I woke up.."

Shikamaru was still silent, staring at him with that indescribable expression.

"My cousin came to visit. You remember Hinata? And she found me in the hallway. There's this beam that goes across it, I had a chain.. one of those dog collars with the spikes on the inside? I was using that to... to.." He couldn't even finish it. "All I could register was this pain in my chest, it hurt so bad I almost couldn't breathe..."

"Neji." Shikamaru suddenly said harshly, grabbing Neji's upper arms. He froze, feeling his heart turn to ice and plummet down to shatter in his stomach. "I.. I think I need to explain some things I've learned to you. Some stuff that's happened to me. I think maybe your actions will make a little more sense."

Neji sniffed again and nodded, unable to release the muscles in his throat enough to speak.

Shikamaru sighed dramatically and moved to put out his cigarette. Then he sat in his recliner, resting his elbows on his knees and his forehead on his fists.

"About.. maybe just short of two weeks ago.. I realized that someone was stalking me."

Neji considered this, already assuming he knew who it was.

"This person stole the tire from my car and returned it with a Jashin symbol painted on the inside. You can probably guess who it turned out to be." Shikamaru lifted his head and looked at Neji, something about him wasn't right to the Hyuga. The way he was looking at him, he didn't like it. It wasn't as if he was looking at 'Neji his lover' anymore, it was like he was looking at a ghost from his past...

"But the thing is, I didn't know he was alive. Apparently everyone else in the world did, but I wasn't on the memo list. I assumed it was another Jashinist seeking revenge for his death. So in an attempt to draw them out and end the problem..." Shikamaru grabbed the bridge of his nose, and Neji's body went numb. What did he do, what the *hell* happened when he tried to force the stalker that turned out to be Hidan into exposing themselves?

"Long story short... I... eh.. I accidentally swore my devotion to Jashin."

Their eyes met and they both stared for what felt like hours. Neji had to force himself to breathe, that... that was the worst explanation anyone had ever given him. He swore himself to a god of slaughter because he was trying to get some stalker to expose themselves. WHAT THE FUCK!? Why didn't he just call them out!? Why didn't he just turn the tides and start trying to stalk them? It's not as if that idiot albino could have possibly been that good at it! For fuck's sake he could sit still or be silent for more than 5 seconds!

"Okay..." He said, unable to think of any other response that wouldn't start a fight between them. "And.. you think this information will help me becauuuse...?"

"Because, Neji, it was his plan all along. Hidan had been stalking me for four months, *four months* and I never even noticed. I kept having

these nightmares about you, and the whole purpose of them was to trick me subconsciously into hating you so that he could take that anger, magnify it, and use it to get what he wanted! What he still wants!"

The baffled and horrified expression Neji was making was the only thing he could register. He heard his own voice squeak out so weakly that he hated himself. "Me. He still wants me."

"Yes." Shikamaru said, standing up and beginning to pace again. "See, I kept having these episodes, as I call them. I was having one when you came back. It was almost exactly the same as what you were describing to me. The only difference was instead of hurting myself, I wanted to hurt other people. I didn't care of the consequences, I didn't care that they had done nothing wrong, I just wanted to maim everyone that I saw." He stopped moving in front of Neji and grabbed both sides of his face gently. "He was working you over too." The Nara's eyes sparked then, and Neji almost burst into tears at seeming the familiar reaction that happened when he managed to fit another piece into the puzzle.

"Because, you already have his mark on you. All you'd have to do is taste your own blood, and kill yourself.. And then.. Then Hidan would have had the okay to kill me, because he wouldn't need me for his plans..." He gave Neji the slightest traces of a smile. "But you didn't. Even if the credit doesn't go to you, it didn't happen. So he went with plan B."

"They sent me to a psyche ward after Hinata found me.." Neji said absently, his eyes clouded over in memory. "I was so scared, I felt like they were going to drug me up and try to kill me in my sleep. I kept fighting them, trying to escape. I think I bit someone once... They had to put me in a straightjacket... I was there for two weeks before I finally started to feel better. Before I felt like my mind was returning to me..."

He was too lost in shock, trauma, and his own recollection to notice the uncomfortable frown on his ex's face.

"I was in therapy for three weeks, I talked to my counselor every day. He helped me make sense out of a lot of things.. I felt like I was finally getting control over my life back. Like I was healing myself through my own strength and determination... That was why I had to come back and see you. I had to face my actions and not only get your to forgive me, but forgive myself. But now.. you're saying that.. it wasn't me. It was that psycho's stupid made-up God?"

"Neji, it was you that fought him off. All I was saying is that it wasn't you that was doing those things. It was him, he had power over you just because of that stupid circle Hidan put on you."

Neji thought this over, and his fists clenched. He knew he shouldn't be angry, it wasn't going to help the situation, but they had both put up with this shit long enough. They could surely kill him, both of them teaming up together. They could both make sure he never saw the light of day again, even if he had to dig the grave himself.

"Where the hell is he?" He growled, not even shocked by the murderous sound of his voice. He had more or less gotten used to hearing such things from himself. Shikamaru hesitated, his brows rising in concern.

" *Where.. is he?*" Neji growled again, feeling the anger envelop him, feeling rationalization go out the window, feeling that crazy need to blood to be spilled. But this time, it wasn't his own, he had no urge to harm himself. No, he wanted to harm Hidan, he wanted to kill him, he wanted to rip each and every bone out of him with his bare hands and toss them in a wood chipper.

Good luck escaping that one, motherfucker.

"Neji.. I can't tell you.."

"WHY THE HELL NOT!?" Neji barked, and Shikamaru took a step back, not in fear, but in concern. Concern that was not meant for Neji Hyuga.

His eyes narrowed at Shikamaru, he was hiding something, what was he still hiding? What more was left to this story? How could it possibly get any more fucked up?

"Uhm.. It's.. it's really complicated..."

"No it's not. He fucking put a curse on me and made me go wallowing through the deepest pits of hell, dragging you along behind me, and all for some stupid fucking deity that he uses to justify his fucking *FUCKED UP BRAIN!* "

The Nara's face shifted again, he almost looked hurt. He looked defensively hurt, as if Neji had just insulted someone he...

... No way..

No fucking goddamn way.

No. Nononononono! Not again! This couldn't be happening again! He couldn't possibly have fallen for it after everything they'd both been through! NO!

"You *like* him." Neji Hissed. It wasn't a question, it was an accusation. He knew Shikamaru well enough to know the signs. He'd seen it before, the man always ended up making friends with people he claimed to hate. He'd called Asuma a hardass when he first started his job, he'd called his old friends Naruto and Kiba 'troublesome hyper idiots' when he first met them. Even Neji had first gotten the sense that Shikamaru wanted nothing to do with him when they'd first been introduced.

But none of those people had done the terrible things that Hidan had. None of them had threatened their lives, none of them had actually tried to kill either of them. None of those people had ever done anything except be a little annoying.

Maybe he could accept becoming friends with Hidan once. Neither of them had known, Neji had even just started to feel the tiniest, most

atomic sized bit of acceptance for him before he'd been attacked in the middle of the night and had it played off as a nightmare. But to fall for it again? After knowing what he knows? After that freak did the things that he did without remorse or even apology?

Just the day before last he was doing it again! Threatening his life, attempting to kill him. And Shikamaru was going to defend him, after all that.

He was shaking now with anger, and his ex was looking at him with a guilty, apologetic sadness that made his blood boil even more. He took a deep breath, in through his nose, and then let it out through his mouth. Gathering what was left of his patience for force out in a trembling voice.

"What haven't you told me yet, Shikamaru?"

The spikey haired man's shoulders slouched, and the desperation in his body language was like a slap to Neji's face every time he moved. He could strangle him, he could reach out and strangle him right now. How could he be so stupid? How could he be so naive? How could he *betray* Neji like this?

He said he didn't hate him, so why was he breaking his heart like this? Why was he doing this to him? Why did he let this happen?

Shikamaru's eyes were flicking to the various exits of the room. He was looking for a way out? Not a chance. Neji could control himself, maybe. He really didn't think it was possible at this point to be any more furious. If Shikamaru would just fill him in, tell him why he's acting this way, at least *try* to explain how he'd let the fucking zombie psycho trick him *again*... Maybe he could calm down. Maybe he could understand, he could sure as hell try.

In all honesty, Neji's sudden, unexplained leaving couldn't have possibly been that easy on him. They had both been fighting invisible tigers, struggling with their own demons, it seemed. But

damn, he would be less angry if he found out his ex had decided to go straight than finding out he had befriended Hidan again.

"Neji.. I can't tell you if you're going to be like this..."

"FUCKING TELL ME OR I'LL GO HUNT HIM DOWN MYSELF!"

Shikamaru hesitated for a moment before his brow creased in irritation too, and he let his eyes fall to the floor. "You need to calm down so you can understand. I don't want to start playing the blame game, but it's hard to explain without one of us being 'the bad guy'."

What? What did this have to do with him? What the hell was so bad about telling him that he and Hidan had bonded?

Unless, unless there was more to it than that..

Unless he didn't just like him. Unless he *really* liked him..

Oh no.. Oh God no. This wasn't happening.

"You.. have... *feelings* for him?" Neji said, his voice almost acidic.

"Neji, I.. I can explain. Well, erm, not really, but I mean I can sort of explain but you have to actually listen-"

"You're fucking *attracted* to the insane fucking person who has tried to kill me twice now?"

"He tried to kill me to.." Shikamaru said dumbly, and Neji couldn't help but swing at him.

"HOW DOES THAT JUSTIFY IT AT ALL!?" He shouted, letting his byakugan kick in and his fists glow with blue chakra. Realization set in the Nara's eyes. Neji was going to pummel him. "I WANTED TO KILL MYSELF FOR THE WAY I TREATED YOU AND YOU GO SHACK UP WITH *HIM!*? "

He swung again, it was easily avoided, and Shikamaru just kept babbling. Neji couldn't even hear him anymore, he was way past rationalization.

"What did you let him do to you huh? Did you kiss him? Did you fuck him? Or did he fuck you?" He snarled. "You fucking stupid WHORE! HOW COULD YOU DO THIS TO ME?!"

Shikamaru suddenly grabbed both of his wrists and wrapped them around Neji's body, putting him in a hold much like the straightjacket he'd worn. He roared at this and struggled with all his might.

Shikamaru Nara, you will feel the wrath of Neji Hyuga. You traitor, you fucking bastard!

"You left!" Shikamaru shouted into his ear, and Neji stopped thrashing for only a moment. "You left me Neji, all alone. I didn't want to make you feel bad but that's what happened. You left me alone and Jashin used you in my nightmares. He tortured me, I was so alone, so empty. I couldn't feel anything, I felt like I wasn't even alive. I just wanted to hold you and tell you I'm sorry, I just wanted you back and.. he tricked me Neji. I don't know how to explain it, if you were in my shoes you'd have done the same..."

"How can you say that." The Hyuga hissed. "I would have killed him or died trying."

"I'm.. I'm sorry. I'm sorry but I'm not. I.. I didn't know you were ever going to come back."

"So that made it okay to stab me in the back?"

"Neji please! It's not as easy as you make it sound!"

"I never should have come back.." Neji said suddenly softly, relaxing in Shikamaru's restraining embrace. "I should have known you'd never forgive me.. This is just your way of proving it. To yourself and to me."

"It's not like that.." Shikamaru said, the brunette couldn't see his face but his voice was in enough pain. He closed his eyes and sighed.

Might as well enjoy his arms around me one last time...

It didn't matter if that's how it was or not. He didn't even *want* to know what the two had done together. But you sure as hell didn't become that attached to someone in two measly weeks without some sort of physical activity to increase the endorphins and make you feel in love. Ugh, he wanted to vomit just thinking about it, God forbid he ever get any images..

Shikamaru.. wasn't his anymore. He would never be again, not in *his* mind. He felt the tears well up once again as this thought crashed into him. No matter who's fault it was, this.. this bridge had been burned. There would be no going back to the way things were, forgiveness or not.

He had come here with the miniscule hope that maybe he could be the one to fix things this time. That maybe since everything was over, they could try once more. Third time's a charm right? After all, compared to what they'd been through that first time, this kind of shit was nothing. At least it had been nothing. But this was a twist of fate that Neji just could not overlook. He would not. He refused to bend on this situation. Maybe he could have tolerated them being friends those two years ago, but that was it. Shikamaru and Hidan... *together?* Ugh.. it left a disgusting taste in his mouth that he didn't know if he'd ever be able to rid himself of.

He could forgive Shikamaru, he could sort of understand his situation. Neji had been broken too, if there had been anyone at all there for him, he probably would have clung to them as well.

But Hidan...

Neji's eyes narrowed and his face hardened. He gently pulled himself from Shikamaru and turned around to face him, mustering

everything he had to remain impassive. It was the best he could do right now.

"So.. it's over then.." he said quietly, and Shikamaru only responded by clenching his eyes shut.

"It's okay.. You didn't hate me when I fucked up, and I can't hate you either. I love you too much for that..." Shikamaru seemed on the verge of tears now, but Neji pushed the pain that caused away and continued. "But.. It's not the kind of love it used to be... Shikamaru, I think you understand. It's not the same, it can't ever be.. I don't think.. that we can overcome this one.."

"Please don't leave me again..." His ex whispered so quietly that the brunette almost didn't hear. Again he stiffened against the flood of emotion and the almost tangible cracking of his heart. He could not be weak anymore, he no longer had anyone to protect him. He had to do it himself, he had to stop being a coward, he had to handle his own messes.

"It's okay. Really Shika. Look at you, you did just fine without me. You look amazing, the things you can do are amazing. I need to do that too, I can't keep dragging you, or anyone else down. If I know that you're here to protect me, I won't ever have the motivation to improve. I.. I would like to say we can still be friends but, we both know that that can't happen."

Neji reached up, standing on his tiptoes, and grabbed Shikamaru's chin to turn it ever so slightly. He could not bear to kiss him, not a real one, not knowing that the psycho's may or may not have been there too. But he had to do something, he needed the closure as well as his ex.

So he kissed him on the cheek, he could handle that much.

"You'll always be one of the best parts of my life, but.. it's not over yet. I need to get on with it, we both do. Goodbye." He stepped

around the spikey-haired man and started for the door. He had just unlocked it and turned the knob when Shikamaru spoke up again.

"Neji.."

He pulled the door open and turned around, smiling an actual smile despite how he wanted to go leap out the window.

"Please. *Please* stop swearing.."

He managed to force out a chuckle even though those three words caused him more pain than anything else he had heard today. His insides were melting in a vat of acid within him, but he could stand it. He could do this, he knew he could. He'd beaten the advances of a God, apparently. He could live with a broken heart.

"I'll work on it.. " He said softly, before closing the door behind him.

The rapping on the window confused him for a moment. He had been pretty preoccupied with staring blankly at the carpet, letting his emotions come and go through him like the shift of tides in a tsunami.

He just couldn't function enough to do anything right now. He.. he just had nothing left. He had nothing to live for, he was Jashin's slave, Neji was gone forever, and he may or may not be falling for a satal mastochist serial killer. Hell, he might even be *becoming* one!

Again there was tapping, and it finally registered with him that someone was knocking on the window. Who the hell knocked? Itachi and Hidan both usually just barged right in.

Possibilities flew through his head like a flipbook as he somehow managed to push himself up to his feet and yank the blind, sending it reeling when he released it. Violet eyes greeted him mischievously and Shikamaru only sighed and rolled his eyes as he undid the lock. Of course Hidan would be back and smiling like an idiot, as if the last

time they'd seen each other he hadn't gone off on some rant and then stormed off.

"Do you really have to bug me right now?" He said wearily, flopping back into his easy chair.

Hidan chuckled as he stepped into the room. "You know I do, pineapple head. Hey, I'm here to help you, cause I'm such a nice guy. Look, I brought you a fucking gift!"

A crinkled bag suddenly landed in Shikamaru's lap. And his brow arched as he studied it, What the hell was this? ' *Heavy duty flooring protector? Easy to clean, easy to install* .' He snorted, despite his current mood, and looked up at Hidan with amused question on his face.

"Don't act retarded. It's for your floor, Kakuzu got that for me once, it actually works really good. Nothing gets through, and all you gotta do is hose the fucker down."

"Hidan.. I don't plan on doing any more praying."

"What!?" Hidan nearly growled. "Don't fuck with me. Seriously, I'm still not in the mood for your bullshit."

Shikamaru sighed and set the tarp on the floor so he could pull out a cigarette and light it up. He took a slow inhale and then released it, all without breaking eye contact.

"The last two times I did, you took advantage of me. Everything just keeps getting more and more fucked up every time I listen to you, or do anything for your benefit."

"Hey! You sure as hell didn't fucking resist very hard!"

"I didn't know what was going on! I was drugged! I could accuse you of rape!"

Hidan stared for a heartbeat before bursting almost violently into a fit of laughter. As mad as this made Shikamaru, he couldn't help be a little amused at the thought himself.

"Hey. You came on to me, Kay? You started it. You're the whore, not me." Hidan said in between laughing fits. "Jashin has no use for rape. He wants souls, not sex."

"Dammit Hidan..." Shikamaru said, pinching the bridge of his nose and trying really hard not to laugh. Damn, Hidan's laughter was contagious. It was hilarious sounding and yet appealing at the same time. He remembered the first time he'd really heard him laughing honestly and not in some insane drug-induced frenzy, it was the very first (and also very last) time Neji had ever gotten high. Even then he'd liked it... "Why do you have to make my life so difficult?"

"You're the only one making it hard. Stop putting so much thought into it, seriously. How fucking much is it helping? Even you keep saying it keeps making shit worse."

"No, *not* thinking things through is what keeps making things worse. You really think I sat there and contemplated how to have sex with you?"

"Stop acting like you didn't enjoy it... Oh Fuck, FOOD!" Hidan's voice trailed out from the kitchen. Shikamaru lurched from his chair and darted in just in time to rip a bag of chips from Hidan's hands before he opened them.

"HEY! Stingy bastard, gimme that back! It's my favorite!"

"Anything edible is your favorite you glutton.. it's a wonder you're not obese."

"Because I'm alive with the glory of Jashin." Hidan said, reaching around Shikamaru for the bag. "Seriously give it here, I'm fucking starving."

"Go buy your own food!" Shikamaru said, opening a cabinet door and stuffing the bag in. "Quit relying on me! That's bad, remember?" He slammed the cabinet shut and turned onto to find the elder man crouched down and rummaging through the bags like an excited 6-year-old.

"HIDAN! Fucking quit!" He grabbed the man by his shoulders and pushed off with his legs, trying to pull him off only to lose his balance and fall on his ass with a rather heavy albino on top of him. "Damn, you're heavier than you look."

"Hey quit trying to grope me you pineapple headed fucker!" Hidan half-shouted, squirming to get back to the bags.

"You're immortal, you don't need to eat my goddamn food! I spent my whole paycheck on those!" Shikamaru wouldn't let go, and to be quite honest this was kind of fun. Hidan was certainly a lot harder to overpower than Neji had been when they'd had their little wrestling matches...

Oh shit, why was he playing with Hidan? It was just as bad as flirting.

He immediatly let go with horror at this thought, and Hidan fell forward, smacking his head on the dishwasher. The feeling vanished and replaced itself with laughter at the scene. Oh man, he really had lost it, to have only minutes ago been almost in tears as Neji broke up with him again, and now... whatever this was..

"THAT FUCKING HURT!" Hidan barked, whirling around and diving on top of Shikamaru, who couldn't help but keep laughing at the sincere glare the zealot was giving him. It was priceless! The whole thing was! He wished he'd had a video camera.

And then his laughter died away.

His heart jumped up into his throat for the millionth time within a couple weeks.

His breath was stolen and he heard a moan somewhere between surprise and enjoyment rumble deep in his throat.

His entire body warmed at the sensation of lips against his. That wicked aggressive mouth that he knew with sober clarity this time most certainly belonged to Hidan. It was only now that he realized that his arms were pinned and Hidan was straddled over his one leg to where the silver haired Jashinists ass was pressed against Shikamaru's thigh.

Dammit, it was happening again. Hidan was doing this on purpose, proving that he didn't have to be under any sort of pressure from Jashin to admit that he wanted it. That they both wanted it.

He.. he knew he should probably pull away. What with the memory of Neji's goodbye kiss so fresh on his mind, even if it had only been a peck on the cheek. But at the same time the thought made him pull his right hand free and tangle his fingers in those silver tresses once again. Hidan gave a low growl and pushed himself harder against Shikamaru, deepening the kiss.

Tongues fought for dominance, hands began to roam, and all too soon Hidan pulled away, licking his lips.

"See?" He purred, "You can't resist me, sober or not."

Shikamaru felt his brows drop in irritation and he pushed Hidan into a somersault over the top of him with his thigh. The zealot just laughed, but Shikamaru's mood was ruined.

Fucking tease.

"You're a bastard." He muttered, trying to focus on putting the groceries away so that his little 'problem' down below would go away without facing Hidan's ridicule.

"Can't argue with that." Hidan laughed from the livingroom, Shikamaru heard crackling and tearing as he tore open the 'gift' he'd

gotten for the Nara. Hell no, there was no way he was going to humor him now, the asshole. Not after that little stunt.

"I'm not praying with you."

"Uh huh.. Sure you're not."

"I'm not kidding. I refuse."

"You keep telling yourself that pineapple head."

Shikamaru slammed the refridgerator door shut and stomped into the livingroom. "You're fucking insane if you think I'm going to do what you want after that bullshit in the kitchen."

Hidan looked at him in amusement, the tarp halfway unfolded. "Mm, you want me that bad huh?"

"NO!" Shikamaru answered quickly, probably a little too quickly. "I hate it when you fuck with my head like that!"

"Which one?" Hidan replied casually, going back to unfolding the tarp and grimacing at the couch. It would obviously have to be lifted up, the damn thing was as big as the entire livingroom. Shit, had he gotten the super XXL or what?

"Shut up! Ugh, you're so fucking troublesome.." He said, letting himself fall on the couch Hidan had just started moving to. He grinned inwardly at himself, two could play these immature little games. "Why can't you just be like a normal person.."

"You mean like your boy-toy?" Hidan said, and Shikamaru met his eyes. He was standing there in front of him with his arms crossed, half-glaring.

"No, that's not what I meant." The Nara said, *really* not wanting to go there. He had somehow gotten into a better mood, and he didn't want to get on that topic again.

"The what the hell do you mean? Cause you fucking confuse the shit out of me too!" Hidan said unexpectedly. Shikamaru froze, he really hadn't seen something like that ever coming out the man's mouth.

"How am I confusing?" He asked slowly.

"Because! Like, what the hell!? You're weird sometimes! You do weird shit!"

Oh yes, *that* cleared the air.

"Like what?"

Hidan growled and went back to trying to figure out the 'floor protector' situation. "Well, like. You didn't kill me, first of all. Then I go and make an ass of myself that one time, and you push me away, and tell me to get lost. And then next time I see you you're all over me. Then your boyfriend comes back and you push me away again. I can't figure out what the fuck you want me to do here."

"Hidan.." Shikamaru said tiredly. What though? He was right, in all honesty. But it was so much more complicated than that. How did he know what was really happening? How was he supposed to know if this still wasn't just some part of Jashin's scheme. He'd already lost Neji, and as much as he hated to say it, he didn't want to lose Hidan, even if he did make his life a living hell.

He liked him. He really did.

"I heard the whole thing, Pineapple head. I don't know why, I really just came because I was starving my ass off and Itachi fucking destroyed the place where I was staying. The asshole. But I stayed and listened to the whole fucking thing."

Shikamaru was at a loss for words now, he'd heard all of that? He'd listened to Neji rant and rave about him and not intervene'd? He hadn't stormed in pissed all to hell and tried to attack either of them?

Why?

"It was pathetic, really. Lol, you two make me wanna throw up."

"Why'd you listen then?" Shikamaru asked softly, he didn't like the way Hidan was acting all the sudden. Whenever he started saying things like these they got into a discussion, and he saw a little deeper into Hidan each time. And each time it only made the puzzle harder to solve.

"I don't know. I felt weird... like.. When princess said he tried to kill himself.. he kept cutting himself.. He says he didn't know why he did it but he's lieing."

"He said he did it because he hated himself. And I'm pretty sure he was being persuaded by Jashin just a bit too."

"He did it just to feel something, pineapple head. Don't blame everything on Jashin. Yeah, maybe he was involved, I don't fucking know, he doesn't tell me everything. But unless you are a full on desciple, and willing accept him, he can't make you do shit."

Shikamaru remained silent, and Hidan finally gave up on the tarp and turned to him. "It made me mad. Like, where the hell does he come off acting like that? But.. something else too. I don't know what.."

Yeah Hidan, where does he come off acting like he had nearly been murdered twice? "Like.. empathy? Was it like what you felt when you first found me?"

Hidan looked at him, his eyes unreadable, his stance rigid. He was thinking, Shika knew. Trying to process the thoughts into words, trying to decided if they were words that could be said, trying to figure out the best way to word them. Wishing he didn't have to say them at all. Hidan really was smarter than he acted.

"It reminded me of myself..." He finally said, so low that it was almost inaudible.

Shikamaru felt like he'd just been punched in the gut. *Neji* reminded Hidan of himself? Those two were on other sides of the universe in personalities. He... he really didn't know what to say. What *could* you say to that? How do you console a Hidan? He'd probably punch him in the face if he tried to hug him.

Maybe, he should pursue it? The enigma of a man was opening up a little, it was a chance to understand more. A chance to find more peices to fit into place.

But how did it remind him of himself? Neji had been so depressed, so traumatized. He was hearing voices and seeing things, and he didn't have Shikamaru there to... Oh, wait.. Was that it? Kakuzu's death? He'd felt like that when he died?

"After you found out about Kakuzu?" Shika asked gently, he had to be careful, at any moment Hidan could decide he'd given away enough and close himself off again. And how he would react would remain a mystery until it was done and over with. There was never any way to predict such things with such people as the Jashinist.

"No.. well.. yes. I was just pissed then.." Their eyes met again and Shikamaru was surprised to discover a softness in them. They weren't wet or on the verge of tears at all, but there was this strange vulnerability to them.

"I didn't even tell him goodbye. I mean, he was always fucking there, he always came back. But he didn't this time..."

Shikamaru shifted, trying to fight the uncomfortable feeling blooming in him. This was strange, even for Hidan. He never talked like this, or about things like this. It was always a matter of sifting through his little hints and riddles. Even if he was usually brutally honest, he didn't talk about himself.

"Being alone.. pineapple head... it sucks. Losing your mind all by yourself, when you can't fucking figure out what's real, what you're actually feeling. Physical pain is the only relief. The only thing that's definitely real. And when there's no hope of death to save you, it just makes it all the worse."

Shikamaru's chest clenched up. Oh no.. He.. he was telling him what he'd gone through when Jashin first took hold of him.. What Shikamaru was going through now, what Neji had had to fight off. It.. it was the same for everyone, apparently. Maybe Hidan *hadn't* always been a psycho. Maybe he'd been normal before.. Maybe he hadn't even wanted to embrace the religion.

No.. you had to accept it to get as far up the chain of command as he was. But.. perhaps he'd had no other choice. He'd had nothing to fight for, nothing to resist. But then, where did Kakuzu come in? After it was already done? How long had they been together? How old were they?

"Hidan.. How did you become a Jashinist?" He asked, but his spirits sank when Hidan's eyes flicked back over to him. They were back to normal, this conversation was over.

"Bahh, that's a fuckin' story for another time. Maybe after you pray with me some more. I know you're obsessed with me but I gotta have my privacy too y'know?"

Shikamaru's brow furrowed, he wouldn't fight it. If Hidan didn't want to keep talking, he wouldn't make him. He was having a hard enough time letting what he'd already said sink in. He actually *felt bad* for Neji... It was like fucking Twilight Zone in here!

"I'm not obsessed with you!"

"Tch, you know you are. Don't feel bad though, I'm obsessed with me too."

"Ohh, shut up."

"Mm, you love the sound of my voice pineapple head."

"Seriously, stop talking and help me put this stupid thing on my floor."

"Awe, so you like it?! I thought you would, and now you don't have anything to bitch about. Win-win."

"Goddammit Hidan, shut the hell *up!*"

A/N-

Hmmm...

I'm not sure what to sayyy about this chapter.

Other than DRAMA-BOMB!

Heh, and a few more threads are woven together in this wonderful story of suspense and magical unicorn shit! Hopefully it all makes sense, I'm much more confident with this chappie, mostly because I got some rest and I'm pumped.

Actually that's a lie I was sicker than hell this morning, the only reason this is done is because I didn't go to work and I couldn't sleep because my stomache is being a huuuuge bitch right now.

But yea, anyway, enjoy my lovelies and don't forget to mother-effing REVIEWWWWWW!

Acceptance

Recurring Nightmares

A/N- Ohai!

Whatt!? An authors note before the chapter!?

But that can only mean...

Yep, that's right, my wonderful amazing awesome bestie Fluffyisemo has returned and brought nosebleeding graphic heaven with her. xD

There were a lot of songs we had in mind for you to listen to this time, but I'm just going to go with 'Freak on a Leash' by Korn, seeing as that's what inspired her.

So yeah, all credit, once again, goes to Fluffyisemo for the last scene.

Enjoy. :)

Four more days pass by, dragging on in slow monotonous regularity. It was nice, really, but at the same time, he'd become used to all the twists and turns his life had recently taken. The high's and lows of emotions was like being on a rollacoaster, it kept it interesting, made it a challenge. But these doldrums had him wanting to pull out his hair, at least until the sun went down. Then he would lay in bed at night and wonder where the hell time had gone.

He'd started going back to work the day Neji had made his second appearance. He had woken up that morning, surprised to be in a good mood with no recollection of a nightmare, or any dream at all. And in the nights since then he had been spared the torment. Work had gone fairly well, no one really even seemed to notice he'd been gone except his ranking supervisor, who instead of welcoming him

back immediatly jumped on his ass about the growing paper mountain on his desk. It was almost as if someone had just rewound, and he was right back where he'd started. It wasn't bad, exactly.. just.. strange. The thought that the world around him had remained perfectly the same while he'd been clinging to sanity while his own little unniverse was tipped completley upside down was admittedly a depressing thought.

Maybe he really could thank the brunette, for coming back to explain, however much of a fiasco it had turned into. It had still been a type of closure, it left no lingering feelings for Jashin to tap into. He hadn't had any uncontrollable urges to kill, there was no nightmares to haunt his sleep... Everything was just so imperfectly *normal*.

Though, another ritual had made itself a nightly part of his day, one he found himself almost excited to perform. Hidan would show up just after dark, giving Shikamaru just enough time to shower, shave, eat, and relax for an hour after he got home. While it honestly was a bit troublesome that he would look forward to the psycho's arrival, he had pretty well gotten past that. It simply didn't matter anymore, apparently his brain had just given up trying to solve that one. And on the other hand, it helped break the cycle of boring normalcy to see him. When he was around, it helped to remind him that the last couple weeks had actually happened.

Each night Shikamaru and the ever-zealous Hidan would pray and meditate. It really had been a strange feeling at first, not resisting as he had been for so long, but once he stopped and focused, he felt a strange sense of serenity. As if everything were perfect in the world, as if he didn't still have problems to be resolved.

It may very well be a trick, seeing as Jashin wasn't nice, and didn't give without eventually asking in return. But Shikamaru couldn't help but push the thought to the back of his mind and enjoy the moment.

He had not felt this whole and unburdened for nearly two years.

And it was all because of a psychotic cult member reappearing into his life. He almost wanted to laugh about it, though really it was still very serious. When he thought back to the days following Neji's initial disappearance, and how he'd acted. When he partnered that with what Neji had gone through, and his suspended state of being barely alive... He wondered how it could have ended up any other way.. What would he be doing now if Jashin had not intervened? Would he have succeeded in his goal to make himself some friends? Would he really have been able to move on?

He didn't know if he would have, honestly. The state he had been in, even though it hadn't struck him as to just *how* stuck in a rut he'd been, most likely would not have been solved just by his own willpower. It took that fight with Hidan to remind that he was not only still alive, but that he wanted to continue being so.

Even so, he still needed to free himself of Jashin, and a part of him knew that the more he kept doing what he was doing right now, the harder it was going to be.

But damn, it just felt so nice.

"You have to hold it like this," Hidan said, drawing Shikamaru from his thoughts and back to his lesson in proper Jashinist etiquette. "With your palm mostly, your fingers are just an extra anchor. " Skillfully he spun the sacrificial dagger in his hand and stretched his arms out with the tip of the weapon pointing to his heart. The position really did look like some sort of biblical stance. "I mean, you ain't gonna fucking be doing it any time soon, but the point is that every little thing has meaning. Which tool you use, how you use it, which part of the body you use it on. You'll know it when you get that far, it makes a difference to use something like this with meaning as opposed to some rusty kitchen knife. They both get the job done, But Jashin appreciates the extra effort..."

"Uh huh..." Shikamaru replied, trying his hardest to recall what they were discussing and why. Apparently it was something to do with sacrificing, though it was probably another one of Hidan's tangents.

He often got sidetracked when trying to explain things, it was pretty obvious he'd never taught anyone before.

Hidan saw through his poorly disguised interest, and the content happiness left him, replaced with the normal irritated demeanor. "Hey if I'm fucking *boring* you with the talk of our lord and savior feel free to give it a try!" He snapped, extending the weapon to his fellow Jashinist.

Shikamaru huffed a small laugh and quickly snatched the blade from a now surprised Hidan, who immediately attempted to reclaim it.

"Hey I was fucking joking you retard! You'll kill yourself!" He managed to snatch it back after literally having to crawl nearly on top of the Nara. And after only a small widening of violet eyes he pushed himself off and back into his own circle before eyeing his 'student' sideways.

"Are you trying to seduce me here Pineapple head?"

Shikamaru only replied with an eye-roll, amused at the miniature show of humility the zealot had shown. "Sorry *sensei*, you're being especially boring today." It was touching that Hidan was actually concerned about his life.

"HEY! It's not my fucking fault if you.. Wh-hey just shut up!"

Shikamaru did his best impersonation of a Hidan-grin "Flustered? Do I make you that uncomfortable?" He inwardly winced. He wasn't as good at this kind of teasing, it just sounded creepy when he did it.

Hidan's eyes narrowed and he twirled the dagger in his palm, making the scene only slightly more menacing. Shikamaru knew well that when it came to him, Hidan was all bark and no bite. At least he thought he knew, until suddenly he was on the ground with the cold blade pressed to his throat.

Damn! It was just a joke!

He struggled a little bit but before he could even make the thought to send to his limbs for action, Hidan had grabbed both his wrists and pinned them down with his knees.

"Knock it off Hidan." He said, a little angry at himself for the fear in his voice.

Hidan tsck'd and lowered his body further. A jolt of excitement shot through Shikamaru and he mentally kicked himself for it. Really? Was it going to be like this every time they touched?

"Don't get cocky pineapple head. When you get cocky you let your guard down. You still don't fucking know what I'm capable of."

This much was true, every time he turned around Hidan had something new. But in Shikamaru's eyes, that still didn't warrant fear. Hidan wouldn't hurt him, not unless Jashin commanded it. And apparently he favored his new disciple just as well. "Get the hell off me! Jeez you're like a ton of bricks, fatass!" With a little bit of chakra to help, he forced himself into sitting upright, pushing Hidan backward and onto his ass. Shikamaru glared and rubbed at his wrists while Hidan snickered.

"That's a new one, I've never been called fat before, seriously." Hidan cackled, then running his tongue along the edge of the gleaming blade, wiggling his eyebrows.

Shikamaru quickly pushed himself to his feet before he had time to react to the action. Jashin! It pissed him off to no end that Hidan was so good at doing that to him. Fucking asshole. He knew he wanted him and played on the demented side of himself that Jashin had corrupted.

"Awe don't run from your feelings pineapple head." Hidan laughed behind him.

Shika just ignored him, rummaging through the cabinets for something quick and easy to eat. "Just clean up the mess will you?"

He pleaded, it was almost like torture to try to decipher Hidan's constant teasing. Did he want him to admit that he felt that way about him? Was he trying to give Shika a hint? But then he'd call him a girl and deny it if it was every brought up, like anytime he showed sensitivity.

Shikamaru himself was past his denial stage. Even Neji could see through him, without really having told him anything. He wouldn't deny it any longer, but that didn't mean he was gonna start picking out curtains with the guy. He was still dangerous, to a degree. He was a pawn in Jashin's plans as much as the Nara himself.

"Tch, it's your apartment. You clean it."

"Hidan.. damn you." He sighed.

All he could really say was thank Jashin tomorrow was Saturday. He'd forgotten how much of a drag it was to try to have a job with the albino idiot around. If Shikamaru was tired and wanted to go to bed, but his guest wasn't. Well, there was no possible way to sleep. Hidan had nearly killed him of a heart attack when he'd come bounding into his bedroom and pouncing onto the bed like a fucking cat two nights ago. They'd had to move the T.V. in there after rearranging the living room to make it easier to get that stupid tarp in and out, and the stupid albino had made himself at home on the bed and turned up some disgustingly morbid horror movie as loud as the volume would go.

Because he refused to surrender his bedroom to the zealot, and because he knew he'd just follow him if he went out and tried to sleep on the couch, Shikamaru had stayed up and watched it with him. Finally he was granted sleep after a stomach-churning two hours.

Honestly he was surprised he hadn't gotten a warning from the complex manager yet. It was almost annoying, really. If they let him get away with this kind of shit then who knows what other people did.

"Nah, been through that before. It's not much fun."

Shikamaru started to smile at this after recalling what he'd said to him before he'd started daydreaming. But he froze as it sank in, wait, what was *that* supposed to mean?

He dropped the bread on the counter and leaned out of the kitchenette to squint at Hidan, who was observing a bloody handprint on his shirt. "What?"

Hidan looked up, expressionless. "What, what?"

"What'd you say?"

"When?"

"Like two seconds ago!" Shikamaru said stepping fully from the kitchen. "Did you say you'd been damned before?"

Hidan stared at him for a heartbeat before answering. "Yeah. People damn me to hell all the time."

Shikamaru's shoulders slumped. That wasn't what he'd meant. They both knew it, but apparently he'd realized his blunder and didn't want to talk about it.

Shika didn't want to let it go, however. He'd been waiting patiently for four days now for Hidan to get back into one of his talking moods. It wasn't a long time in reality, but it seemed forever in his own mind. "You said a few days ago that you'd tell me more about how you got involved with Jashinism if I worked with you on it."

Hidan didn't answer this time, he only got to his feet and went to get the cleaning supplies, pushing past the Nara uncharacteristically gently. He waited for the silver hair to come back out before tailing him. "Hidan, I just want to know. I'm curious."

"Yeah well that kills cats. And it's none of your damn business anyway. You're doing fine, thanks to me."

You're doing fine... That was a strange response. He wasn't asking for additional help, he was just asking for the sake of knowing. It was driving him crazy. Trying to imagine Hidan as an average person, with a life and maybe a job and a normal lover. And suddenly Jashin decides he would make a great descipel and bam, crazy town.

Shika huffed and pulled the scrubber from Hidan's hands, glaring right back at him when he looked up. "You keep saying you had to do everything on your own, that it took forever to figure out, that it took years and years. You can't be past 30 from the looks of it, and thats at the most. So unless this all happened when you were a toddler, then it doesn't really add up."

Hidan responded with an irritated growl and straightened to his full height, attempting to *stare* Shikamaru into submission.

Intimidation doesn't work on me Hidan, you should know that from what you did 5 seconds ago.

"Hey if you don't wanna talk about it I can always go ask Itachi.."
Shikamaru shrugged, and Hidan's face twisted.

"He hasn't known me long enough to tell you shit."

Shikamaru tried to keep the interest from his features. It was actually pretty easy to get information out of Hidan as long as you knew what buttons to push... just so long as you didn't push too many.

"How old are you exactly?"

Again Hidan was quiet, but it was a thoughtful silence. The way his forehead wrinkled and his eyes darted around the room while not really focusing on anything almost gave Shikamaru the impression that he didn't know. That couldn't be right though... could it? Maybe Shikamaru'd entertained the thought that Hidan could be hundreds of years old, but for it to actually be true... That would probably shred any bit of saniry the Nara had left.

"Hidan..?" he chided, stepping closer with his head tilted ever so slightly. "You don't know how old you are?"

"Shut the hell up I'm thinking!"

... Age was not something that needed this kind of consideration. Sure, maybe a few seconds, even Shikamaru had forgotten his own birthday for half a second before. But this was far too much of a thought process.

"When is your birthday?" He pressed on, but as easily as he could. The crazy man really seemed to be having a hard time with this, in fact it almost looked like it was upsetting him.

"April. I know it's in April. The second I think..."

"You think?"

"Yeah, did I fucking studder? Shit kid, back the fuck off." Hidan's order had only a miniscule amount of force behind it, something that definitely struck the spikey haired Jashinist as strange. Usually he was barking at him like crazy, but this... this was something new. A sore spot it seemed, even moreso than Kakuzu and empathizing with Neji. It was almost like a repressed memory...

Hidan fell onto the couch and leaned his head backward to stare at the ceiling. "Damn, I almost miss how Kakuzu didn't give a shit. You and your fucking questions... they piss me off, seriously."

Shikamaru shifted his weight to one leg and crossed his arms, staring in puzzlement at his... whatever Hidan was to him. Itachi was right, Hidan was impossible to figure out. Every day it seemed he had a surprise in store, every day he threw some new variable into the equation that threw off everything Shika had thought he'd figured out.

It honestly was like he didn't want anyone to know, yet at the same time he was begging everyone to at least try.

Hidan lifted his head and violet eyes focused on the Nara, both questioning and threatening him, daring him to keep digging, to see how far he could make it before he either struck oil or hit a mine.

Should he though? He was curious, yes, but what kind of burdens would he be taking on if he managed to crack the psychos outer shell? There was no telling, absolutely no way to predict. For all he knew he might just break the space-time continuum if he kept this up.

"Hidan.." He finally said, eyeing the spot next to the sprawled out man, who did not give him any sort of acknowledgement that he'd heard, aside from his continued stare. "Tell me."

A silver brow arched in question, but the vulgar mouth remained shut.

"I want to know, and I think you want me to know too." He finally moved to the loveseat and sat cautiously beside the immortal. Not too close to cause discomfort, but not so far away as to make it seem he didn't care.

Hidan only blankly stared for while, an eternity it seemed, though really it was only a couple minutes, if even. He finally sighed quietly and ran a hand through his hair.

"You're too damn nosy..."

Shikamaru almost gave up. He took in the breath to sigh and inwardly crumpled. There was no way Hidan was ever going to tell him, not now, not ever. But he hadn't finished, and the Nara's gaze snapped back into focus as he continued.

"I think you're expecting more than I can give..."

He was going to do it? Spill his beans? Share his story? The spark of childlike excitement that shot through Shikamaru almost made him

want to stand up and do a victory dance. He mentally slapped himself, *Calm down you're not winning a fucking award here..*

Still though, it was like making some kind of huge scientific breakthrough, discovering a new species of dinosaur or cracking the chicken and the egg theory. Okay.. well that last one wasn't science-related... but still.

"I don't... remember a lot. I just remember how it felt. I knew I was dieing, and everything hurt. But not really strong pain, just something that I'd lived with so long that it had become normal..."

Shikamaru listened intently, feeling like a little kid being told a story by his grandfather.

He'd been living in pain for awhile, but that didn't give very much away. He could have been an old man who's body was failing him, or even a child with cancer.

"I was fucking terrified." Hidan said hesitantly, obviously not wanting to admit to it. "I didn't want to die. I can't remember what I even had to live for.. but I felt like I wasn't finished. That this couldn't be the end, that I still had the will to keep fighting but my fucking shitty body was betraying me." His voice had gone soft again, and it only made it pull harder on Shika's heartstrings.

"I don't know what happened. I can't even remember. I kept hearing voices, I think someone was fighting, and everything was so loud and the world was spinning and shaking. I was pissed, pissed beyond any kind of rationalization. But scared, and so confused that it ws just making me even more pissed. Why? Why did I have to die? Why do I have to die with nothing, no legacy, nothing to be remembered by? And I thought to myself... 'I will do *anything* . Anything at all, if I could just stay alive, keep being a part of *this* reality."

Shikamaru swallowed audibly, staring intently at Hidan. It probably would have been super creepy if the suddenly somber man were

paying attention instead of looking down at his own hands.

"I knew I had more purpose than that. I knew I couldn't let it end this way. I knew *somehow* without having any reason why that I could not just leave the world like this, a shitty abomination. A sorry excuse for a person."

A pause, a pause so long that for a moment Shikamaru was afraid to even move, thinking Hidan might have forgotten he was there.

"I'm almost positive I had black hair... kinda like yours."

Whoa. There was a mind blower. That explained why he liked Shikamaru better with his hair down, it was sort of a subconscious rendition of a memory he had. Not of someone else that he loved, but of himself, how he had been when he was truly alive. The more Hidan talked about it the more convinced the Nara was that he had died young, possibly even at the age he appears now.

Wow, Hidan really was dead. He was the living dead. He was a zombie. Shikamaru had affections for a zombie. He'd slept with a zombie.

He resisted the urge to shudder, telling himself that he had known this all along. That it shouldn't just now be affecting him, and for him to suddenly be repulsed by Hidan for the fact would not only be really rude and fucked up, but would probably piss him off to the point where he'd either kill him or never talk to him again.

He could live with it, he consoled himself. It would just be something they could tease each other about, now that it was out in the open.

"After that... I'm not really sure. The first whole thing I can remember is trying to figure where I was... I only remember because there was this mirror. It might even have just been a window, but I was so confused and lost and only half-way conscious that I remember thinking my reflection was someone else. How fucking dumb is that? I was sitting there fucking crying like a weak little piece of shit,

begging for it to tell me what the hell was happening. And I eventually realized what it was, which just made me flip shit. I know I broke it, cause I was looking at the peices on the ground and still thinking it was someone else looking back at me, and I started punching it..."

Shikamaru had heard enough now. He couldn't really take much more. He had wanted to know more, but he couldn't handle this. He couldn't think of Hidan in that way, he couldn't believe the things he was telling him.

He.. he couldn't even imagine how it would feel. It would be like the worst kind of nightmare, one you could never wake up from. Hidan had got what he wanted, he was alive, but at what cost? Being unable to even remember *why* you wanted to stay alive, having a second chance like that, and not knowing why you had it, or what you were supposed to do with it... It was a miracle he wasn't even *more* insane than he was.

"I saw my blood, and for some reason it calmed me down. I can't fucking tell you why. It just made me feel better. And I would start purposely making myself bleed, because it was the only thing I understood, even though I didn't. I knew that if I used something sharp and slashed myself with it, that blood would come. And it always did, it never failed."

Again the albino hesitated, sighing deeply. It was an awkward thing for Shikamaru, sitting there while he relived this terrible, fucked up past and didn't seem affected by it. As if it were some fond memory, as if he hadn't been through the worst kind of hell on earth...

Then he sat forward and stretched, and Shikamaru breath whooshed out of him. Oh thanks Jashin... it was over.. Fucking hell, he'd never ask to know more about Hidan ever again.

"After that you can pretty much paraphrase it however you want. Eventually I ended up tasting my blood, and I had a little introductory meeting with Jashin. I stopped hurting myself and started helping

him to pass his judgement on others, learning along the way. Fuck, I loved seeing their faces after they thought they killed me. It was the best thing ever, the fucking heathens. I still love it, never gets old. Yours was absolutely priceless, I really thought I was going to have to let you go change your pants."

Shikamaru forced out a weak laugh. He'd honestly thought the same thing. "Yeah, you really got me.."

Hidan grinned at him, already back to his normal self. A fact that Shika was strangely comforted by, the man would bounce right back from anything, it seemed. He really was unbreakable, though one would assume that would be a pretty standard side effect from being immortal. You had no choice but to be emotionally strong... or maybe just dead inside.

"So, pineapple head, did you get your fill or what?"

He felt his mouth open as he tried to reply, but he really couldn't think of any words to describe how he was feeling right now. Did he get his fill? Uh yeah, Hidan probably could have stopped talking after the first five minutes. But that wasn't really what the descipel of the Slaughter God was asking, was it?

He had to be careful how he replied, you always had to be with Hidan, though it was an easy thing to forget. He really hadn't actually answered any of his questions, although now he knew when his birthday was. But at the same time it had shed a vast amount of light on all the aspects that previously had been lost in the darkness. It didn't really help him at all in dealing with anything, but it made him feel better, somehow. It satisfied his curiosity.

"Yeah. That was pretty enlightening."

"You look like you're gonna hurl."

"Uh.. yeah. I might."

"Tch, that wasn't even the worst part. I left out all the gorey stuff. I didn't wanna overload you, cause I'm such a nice guy, ya know."

Shikamaru finally locked eyes with him again, and his unease disappeared almost immediately. Hidan was smiling, one of his real smiles, but with something else lying just under the surface of it.

Was that... was he *grateful*?

Psh, no way..

Shikamaru sighed, and pushed himself up from the couch. He was hungry still, something that he thought odd for only a moment before pushing the thought away. He took a step to make his way to the kitchen, and only barely managed to contain the humiliating yelp that would have escaped him before he was yanked roughly backward.

He couldn't even process it before for the fourth fucking time his mouth was being attacked in the best possible way. It was all he could focus on, the only thing that existed, that evil tongue and these terrible lips that had tasted the blood of so many victims. Arousal exploded within him like independence day fireworks and he pushed back, receiving a hungry growl for the effort. He couldn't even think straight, what had he been doing? How had this started? Ohh fuck he didn't know but now that it was it better not end or he was literally going to rip this man's head off with his bare hands.

He was only aware of the slightly demeaning way he was draped across Hidan just before they broke apart long enough for the gorgeous demon underneath him to effortlessly drag him into a straddling position. Shikamaru wasted no time in reuniting their mouths and digging his hands into that soft, silky, silver hair. He nearly moaned in joy when he felt the ponytail being removed from his own.

Yes, oh Jashin, Hidan was serious this time. And there was no Neji to plague him, there was no blood-high to cast that dream-like quality

over it. It was going to happen, and even though he was literally scared shitless, it just made it all the more exciting.

It was so fucking good. Hidan's hand had that delicious death grip in his hair, his other arm wrapped around his lower back, his hip in that bruising grasp.

Shikamaru felt like he was suffocating, being held so tightly but yet still not tight enough. Scarcely being able to breathe through every scorching touch of tongue, lips, and teeth. His air literally being stolen from his lungs. His body already shaking in the demons grasp.

His own hands ran down from Hidan's neck, over cotton covered abdominals just to sneak under the material. He scratched the pearly skin lightly, just his nails running up over dangerously hard muscle.

He latched onto Hidan's shoulders with blunt nails when his tongue was assaulted with a viciously hard suck and a nip with teeth. An embarrassing needy sound leaving him causing a smirk to form on the mouth against his lips.

Hidan let go of his hair then and he almost fell backwards from trying to get away from that wicked mouth that was trying to deprive him of oxygen. He was dragged back by Hidan grabbing his shirt, his forehead landing on his own cotton covered hand, panting hotly into the zealots neck.

Hidan's lips were on his collarbone, teeth pulling flesh and scratching up shikamarus bared throat. That vulgar mouth lightly teasing around the Nara's ear, hot breath making a violent shiver run through him.

Fuck, how did Hidan do this to him? He'd barley touched him, his whole body was already set ablaze. He couldn't believe how much passion was in every move the albino made. Even the rough movements felt so fucking good.

Suddenly Hidan's hands were pushing him up, making him kneel over him. His shirt was being pulled up and without a second

thought, Shikamaru took it from the elder Jashinists grasp, pulled it off himself and tossed it away from them.

His hair fell into his eyes as he focused his attention back on Hidan who was running the tip of his tongue along his pant line. A shallow hiss left the Nara's lips as his flesh was taken between teeth and abused with bruising suction. His hands were tangled in both Hidan's hair and shirt as shallow pants left his bruised lips.

Was every time going to be like this? That glorious, hellish mouth torturing him into submission. The fear of not knowing what Hidan was going to do to him; the excitement of wanting him to do everything and more.

He let his eyes fall shut and as his head fell back as Hidan continued to suck hickeys into his flesh. A deep raspy sound pulled from the dark haired man as he has brutally bitten. The wicked, slick lips slid up his abdomen from his lower stomach and his hands were ceased and held behind his back.

When Hidan finally raised his vision, the Hellfire was back in his eyes and that smirking mouth was smeared in a tiny amount of blood.

Shikamaru's libido lurched and he violently pulled his hands from the zealots hold and grabbed onto the back of his neck, bringing their mouths harshly back into contact.

The metallic taste mixing with Hidan literally made his senses spin. Shikamaru boldly reached down and harshly squeezed the girth held captive in the elder Jashinists jeans, ripping a low groan from the mouth that he was still plundering.

Shika hungrily pushed his hips into Hidan's and moved his mouth to the demons ear. "You make me so crazy", his voice so breathless and husky it sounded foreign to his own ears.

He was suddenly slammed sideways, his back meeting the plush surface of the love seat. And an all too familiar wait settled onto him,

scorching violet starting right into his soul.

"You're making it really hard for me not to hurt you.." Hidan's voice was so raw and he punctuated his statement with a rough press of hips into shikamaru. As soon as the action was done shikamarus hands were harshly pulling the cotton shirt from Hidan and tossing it. His legs locked around the strong pelvis that was rocking against him in slow hard pistons.

The flesh of his neck was attacked again, teeth violently sinking into his skin and he yelled in a half pained half ecstatic scream. His eyes falling shut

He was so hard it hurt, he couldn't fucking breathe, his body was on the verge of terror at the ferocity of Hidan's actions. But, he wanted it, he wanted it so fucking much. His hair was fisted to the point of violent pleasure.

He squeezed his eyes even tighter shut as they began to sting, desperate not to let his tears fall. He felt Hidan practically rip the denim he was wearing open and slip them down over his hips and onto his upper thighs. Hidan sat up then and Shika released the grip of his legs around beast so he could undo his own jeans.

The Nara released a shaky breath and pulled the rest of his clothing off. He was dragged into hidan again, burning, hot flesh meeting with no barrier and a half yell left him. His eyes opened and he watched Hidan sensually lick the naras blood from his lips. Abruply Hidan's chakra surged fiercely.

A beat.

Shikamaru stared half in horror and half in utter awe as Hidan's body began to turn ebony. The stark white skeletal visual appearing against black.

His whole body shuddered. He vaguely recalled the fear he'd felt the first time seeing Hidan like this. But it was hurriedly pushed away by

arousal.

Hidans hands were roughly caressing his flesh pressing down into shikamaru in a tight, heavy roll of those dangerous hips. He was ceased then and pulled onto his knees, into the older mans lap. The tainted with black, muscled skin of his biceps was held in a death grip by the Nara.

Hidans hands moved to firmly hold his ass cheeks and his slick cock ferociously dragged against Shika's crack.

"Oh Jashin..." his voice a muffled whimper, the naras face pressed tightly into the demons neck. His own cock was trapped between their bodies. Precum making the controled rocking of his hips slick.

He was going to loose his fucking mind. Hidan was still teasing him, tortuous slow, hard friction against his entrance. It was too much. He was about to explode and they hadn't even really started yet.

He straightened up then and tangled his fingers into silver, pulling Hidan's head back and locking eyes with burning amethyst.

He reached behind himself then and took hold of Hidan's heavy cock, quickly stroking it to spread the precum leaking from the beautifully demonic being.

He leaned back into the zealot again, eyes falling shut as a shaky breath left his mouth. The nara rested his forehead against Hidan's temple. He then felt blunt, hard pressure on his entrance.

His arms wrapped around Hidan's back as he desperately tried to will his body to relax.

Fuck, this was gunna hurt

Light, feathery breath tickling his ear made him quake. "Embrace it", Hidan's voice was enough to make an angel fall from grace. How

could Hidan be so brutally gentle, so fierce and yet so loving in every touch. It made his heart hammer.

Shikamaru was suddenly hyper aware of the connection between them. The ritualistic quality of the whole situation. No wonder his body was so overloaded by heady arousal, he could feel everything. It was enough to raise goose bumps on his overheated skin.

Hidan pulled him down onto him slowy, tortuously, agonizingly slow. The stretch of his insides being filled so wholly, shook him to the very core.

It hurt so terribly, so gloriously. He could feel how Hidan felt. Every single tiny moment made sparks dance behind his eyelids.

Shikamarus fingernails had carved themselves into the black skin of the elder Jashinists back, biting crescents into chorded muscle.

When Hidan couldn't connect them any closer he stopped pushing and shika let out a broken sob. It was so deep. So fucking deep, ever fiber of his being vibrating in malicious ecstasy.

The rocking started slowly, a ripping, agonizing pull and push of beautiful, welcomed pain. So good, it was so fucking unbelievably heavenly.

Shikamaru felt a sharp slap to his ass and a brutal grab and he was being stabbed into. Hard, and still agonizingly slow. Rough hands moving over his abused, trembling body.

Shikamaru realized then how completely and utterly perfect he felt in this moment. That beautiful serene peacefulness seemed to have them both in its grasp.

The naras lungs burning fiercely as he desperately sought the oxygen that he just couldn't seem to keep in his lungs. Hidan's mouth was over his in a second and deliciously fucking his mouth with that wicked tongue.

Shikamaru started pushing down onto that hellacious cock that was ripping him in two and holding him grounded all at once.

His mouth was released and he watched in a lusty haze as the hellions blood covered hand reached for his bleeding hip and smeared the crimson violently across his torso.

They locked murky, hungry eyes and the pace doubled immediately. Shikamaru screamed. Head thrown back as his inside were filled over, and over, and over.

Hidan's own breath was hitching as they both fought for release. With a deep growl Hidan's scarlet stained, slick hand grasped and start stroking the shadow users over sensitive tool.

"Hida-Hidan...", there was no power behind his hissing whisper. The deep heat inside him was coiling like a deadly spring in his stomach, threatening to rip his soul from his body. Shikamaru was openly sobbing now. The tears finally falling from damp lashes and his entire body locked up.

All it took was Hidan vile mouth biting into the junction of shoulder and throat and he was coming. His body seized violently and causing the demon to spill and bath his inside in silky, molten fire. His own release flying up and roping onto both off them.

The dizziness came then and his whole body went limp and Hidan finished using him. His ears rang and he desperately attempted to regain his harsh panting, eyes watching in wonder as the onyx faded and left Hidan's flesh completely.

Eyes slipped closed and his body betrayed him. Hidan moved them to were they were both settled into the loveseat. The last thing he registered before the darkness took him was a tired, warm chuckle and nip to his earlobe.

A/N-

APPLAUSE! SO MUCH APPLAUSE!

No seriously Fluff, I bequeath to you this 'Best Yaoi Scene EVAR' Award, and those of you who agree, let her know. Seriously.

Words can't even explain.

DISCLAIMER: Wierdo and Fluffy are not responsible for any injury and/or death caused from severe bleeding of the nostrils.

Ahem, anyway, unfortunately that's going to be the last of these. I figured 'Hey, why the hell not give you all one more before shit starts hitting the fan?' And lemme tell you, I'm glad I did.

Fluffy is glad too. :)

Also, I feel that for the sake of anyone I haven't personally PM'd, I need to give you a small spoiler so that you don't stop reading. You have not seen the last of Neji, It would make absolutely NO sense to suddenly remove him from the story after being such a giant part of the plot.

So, with that said, I've also decided that the theme song for the HidaxShikaxNeji triangle of love/hate in this fic is 'Try' by Pink. Haven't heard it? Go listen. It's so fucking perfectly fitting that it almost pisses me off.

Alright, forgive all typos again! I promise I'm working on them... And with that I say farewell until the next chapter, and remind you all that I love you for reading, but I would love you more if you REVIEW!

Secrets

Recurring Nightmares

Shikamaru was aware the instant he woke up, but being as unbelievably comfortable as he was, he kept his eyes shut and only sighed.

He remembered also within that second that it was Saturday, and allowed a small prayer to his new God. That wouldn't be too much, he didn't think. Waking up in such a pleasant mood was something that didn't happen so often to him, and he would push aside his ideals for a second to count his blessings.

He shifted to roll himself over, barely able to notice the fact that his bed felt really crowded over the protesting of his body at the movement.

Damn he felt so cozy, it's like he was covered up in a heat pack instead of just a blanket. Like he was snuggled up in some sort of little nest instead of an flat, empty mattress.

When he finished rolling over, and his forehead was resting against something that did not feel like a pillow, his eyes flashed open. The sight of a bare chest let the recollection come flowing back into him, softened and soothed by the serenity still gripping his very soul.

He stared still though, at the gently shifting, perfectly toned torso before him, resisting the urge to free his arm currently tucked between the two bodies just to run a hand over it, to make sure it was real. He knew it was, especially when a small groan escaped the body pressed tightly against him and the muscular arm draped across his hips squeezed tighter for a brief moment. But at the same time, it was so unexplainably surreal.

He smiled to himself and released a content sigh, trying not to chuckle to himself at the thought of cuddling with Hidan. Like a bipolar teddy bear. One minute he was soft and sweet, and the next he was trying to kill you. It was good though, it just felt so natural, so right... even though he knew it was wrong..

The crease of his lips faded as he considered this thought, wanting to resist but unable to fight away what he knew to be the truth.

As happy as he was, as wonderful as he felt... it could not last. Shikamaru was a Jashinist, as was Hidan. It was a ticking time bomb of a relationship. Jashin was not a kind deity, he fed on chaos and destruction, on pain and misery. Every step that he and the zealot took toward each other was nothing but a stepping stone, building him up and up with the knowledge that inevitably, the foundation would crack and sooner or later he would come crashing down.

Jashin preyed on the human need to be happy, he dangled it on a string just in front of them until he grew tired of watching the pursuit and let them fall into his trap.

The dark haired follower clenched shut his eyes, as if the simple action would chase the concept away. He pressed himself even closer into the man beside him, wishing he could hide here forever from his pessimism.

Or... maybe because they *were* both disciples of the Slaughter God... Maybe he could grant this one favor. Maybe he could overlook it, reward them for all the shit they both continued to put up with thanks to Jashin. Yes... yes that could happen. The could definitely happen. He repeated this to himself over and over in his head.

Even if it could, even if it was nothing more than a hopeful delusion, he could believe it for now. He could convince himself of it and relish in it until the time came when he would have to face the music.

He re-opened his eyes, tilting his head up to look at the person spooning him. The smile returned to him as he studied the zealots face. Silver brows bunched ever so slightly in the middle, letting the man's usual irritated demeanor show through even in an unconscious state.

Honestly, he would never have thought he would think such a thing of a being he used to think was good for nothing but wreaking havoc and devastation, but he looked so cute right now that it was almost unbearable to keep staring. But at the same time he couldn't tear himself away, it was mesmerizing. How could someone like Hidan, someone so loud and obnoxious and rude and irritating, also be so comforting and gentle and... sweet even, in his own sort of way.

It was kind of strange too... in a way. Usually it had been Shikamaru in Hidan's position, holding Neji so possessively. It was strange to have the roles reversed... But not so strange that he was even going to consider doing anything about it.

It was good, he decided. This would work for him, he could live with this, he could be with Hidan. Maybe it had been an absurd idea before, but right now it made so much sense that he couldn't seem to recall why he had even been so opposed to it.

And as he stared at the pale, sleeping Jashinist, the man who very well may just be some sort of fallen angel, he suddenly realized something that made him simultaneously want to burst into tears of joy and scream until his throat bled.

Something he didn't even want to say to himself within his own mind.

This... it couldn't be true. He was just overloaded with a hormone rush from last night...

Perhaps he could be okay with feeling something for Hidan. But.. not this much, this was too much affection. This was bordering on love, and it terrified him. It was just mutual crush butterflies, it was just the oxytocin flooding his brain from being in a new relationship.

It wasn't love. It couldn't be love.

This wasn't some fairytale or chickflick... happily ever afters didn't happen. Solutions were only as permanent as the second in which they happen. It could leave at any moment...

Just stop thinking. Let it happen.

He took a deep breath, blinking slowly while he did. And when his vision returned he was greeted for only a split second by a pair of sleepy violet eyes.

Then he was grunting from the pain suddenly shooting up his backside.

"SHIT PINEAPPLE HEAD! DAMN!"

He looked back up at a stunned Hidan from his new position on the floor, in a sitting position now but with his face buried in his hands.

"What the hell did I do?" Shikamaru shrilled back, clearing his throat afterword to try to cover the embarrassig pitch his voice hit due to surprise.

"Fuck, you were all up in my face. Jashin you're lucky I didn't have a fucking knife on me."

Shikamaru felt his face burn as he realized for the second time now that he was naked. And he wasn't the only one either.

"You were the one with the deathgrip on me..." He halfway fibbed, pulling the blanket that had thankfully come with him to the floor tighter around him. He paused for a moment, realizing Hidan must have covered them up after he'd fallen asleep.

Hidan looked up at him then, surprising the Nara with the small amount of pain reflecting in his eyes.

"I... forgot it was you.." The shaken man admitted, and the small amount of irritation Shikamaru had was gone in that moment.

Is that why he'd looked troubled in his sleep? Because he'd mistaken Shika's presence for Kakuzu...

Well damn, so much for feeling good...

He forced a smile. "I gotta say I never took you for a cuddler..."

"Hey speak for yourself fucker! All crying on me last night. Why you always gotta make shit awkward!?"

Again Shikamaru had to resist a blush, but it was easy once he took a good look at himself. Dammit, he was covered in blood again. It would be nice if he could wake up just once after one of these sessions and not be grossed out...

"Ugh, I need a shower..." He muttered, choosing not to reply to the crying comment and pushing himself to his feet.

He was spared further embarrassment as he made his way to the bathroom, Hidan remained silent. He halfway expected him to try to take one with him.

He was glad the offer wasn't presented, because honestly he probably would have taken it. Seeing Hidan wet and soapy would make up for any discomfort it caused...

He turned the faucet and listened for any further commentary from the zealot, but the silence persisted and he found himself smiling at the realization that this was the first time Hidan had actually spent the night here.

The fact that this didn't seem strange was even more calming. Until he started wondering where the hell the albino had been going each night, seeing as he'd told Shikamaru a few days ago that Itachi had wrecked his residence.

What was that about? Was the Uchiha trying to run him out of town? Or... given the talk they'd had last time he saw him, maybe he was playing matchmaker.

Damn, his friends (or the people he'd come to think of as friends) were all a troublesome group of crazies.

And apparently he fit in perfectly with them.

xx

After a good long shower and allowing Hidan to take one as well, Shikamaru stood staring at the couch. The thing was a mess. Honestly he didn't know if he should bother cleaning it up or just throw the thing away. Damn, it was a good thing he wouldn't have to worry about Neji finding out, the stupid hunk of furniture had cost almost a grand thanks to the Hyuga's expensive tastes.

"Do you not ever fucking use hairgel or what?" Hidan called out above the ruckus he was making, most likely destroying Shikamaru's medicine cabinet in his search for the previously mentioned item.

"I think Neji left some hairspray in that hall closet."

"Hairspray is for chicks, pineapple head.." Came the weary reply.

"Well fucking excuse me for not thoroughly planning for your overnight visit!" He snapped sarcastically. "Go get yours."

"Goddammit..."

Hidan emerged from the room with damp, tousled hair, and gave Shika a crooked half-grin when he noticed the gawking. He had nothing but a towel around his waist, and dammit if he didn't look good enough to eat right now.

"Looks better like that anyway.." the darker haired Jashinist sputtered out. The compliment was rewarded with a grin that was quickly masked.

"Yeah, well we both have our preferences. Stop drooling and gimme my fuckin pants will'ya?"

Shikamaru did so while making a face. "You're putting your bloody clothes back on?"

"Hey, excuse me for not bringing a goddam overnight bag with me!" Hidan mocked, "And no fuckin' offense but I'm not gonna squeeze into any of your scrawny-ass clothes."

The Nara surprised himself with a laugh before lighting up a cigarette. He was calling Hidan fat and being called scrawny in return. It was a complicated relationship, this one. Neji *never* took insults so well, though he usually had no problem dishing them out.

"Lemme bum one of those." His... hmm. Would he consider Hidan his boyfriend? Ew, those two words in the same sentence were just plain fucking weird.

"Last one." He tipped the cigarette toward the man who threw his hands up in the air.

"Fucking hell you're a terrible host pineapple head. Won't let me have your food, can't keep hairgel around like a normal person, and now you won't share your smokes. Why the shit do I keep coming over here!?"

"If you're gonna cry about it you can have this one. I'm gonna go get more anyway." Shikamaru droned, taking the smoking cancer stick and extending it.

Hidan's face twisted in disgust. "I don't want your slobbery fuckin' cig you creep! Just cause I tolerate making out with you doesn't mean I wanna drink your spit."

Shikamaru just stared at him boredly. Did he have any idea how little sense he just made? It wasn't as if the spikey haired man sucked on them like a bottle.

"Whatever.." He muttered, returning it to his own mouth and inhaling. "I'm gonna go get more. You should go home and change." Smoke puffed out in time with each word, and Hidan grimaced.

"Well what the hell then?"

Shikamaru raised a brow in question.

"I mean like do I fucking come back or what?"

Shikamaru snorted and moved to the door, opening it as he replied. "You're a big boy Hidan, you don't need my permission to go do whatever you want."

"As you wish, my pineapple headed master."

If Shika were into dominatrix type shit, that sentence may have been interesting enough to pursue. But unfortunately such a thing would inevitably get out of hand if Hidan were involved.

So he only chuckled and locked the door behind him after his not-boyfriend but still boyfriend slipped out as well.

"Shikamaru!"

He nearly jumped out of his skin when Itachi's voice suddenly invaded his mind, causing the cashier handing his receipt to look at him funny, as if asking him if she needed to call the police.

He gave her an apologetic smile and snatched the piece of paper from her ridiculously long acrylic nails, then collected his things and hurried out of the convenience store.

"Answer me, it's important." The bodiless voice said again.

Shikamaru finally stuffed the two packs in his pockets and juggled his fountain drink to take a look at his hand.

Shit, he was still wearing that ring...

Immediately his entire body locked up. Oh god, if Itachi heard what they did last night because of that sudden surge of Hidan's chakra...

Oh Jashin... kill me now... NOT REALLY!

Hesitantly he pumped it into his ring finger and lifted it closer to his mouth.

"I'm here..." Ugh, why didn't he just blurt it out if his voice was going to betray him?

"I need to speak with you immediately. Meet me at the diner on 6th near your apartment. Do not let Hidan follow."

"Uh.. okay. Be there in a minute."

It was a good thing he didn't have anything important to do, and a coincidence that he'd just half an hour ago sent the zealot away so he wouldn't have to come up with some excuse.

Then again.. Maybe Itachi knew that and had waited until now to contact him.

Christ, he needed to introduce cell phones to these two.

Hearing no more response, he sighed and tried to push the terror from him, it was making it a little hard to breathe.

If Itachi had heard all that in his head... oh fuck he could never look him in the eyes again. He couldn't even be around the older Uchiha anymore...

Well, he might as well just head there now. It wasn't as if he could avoid the man, he knew where Shikamaru lived after all.

xx

The trek there didn't take too long. With it being such a short distance he opted to just walk there. Though in the middle of the afternoon in a concrete jungle under a cloudless sky, he almost wished he'd been lazy and taken the air-conditioned car.

The little bell dinged as he entered and his nostrils were affronted immediatly by the smell of fried greasy foods and alchohol. Gross, this place was like a bar hiding behind the disguise of a family-oriented restaurant. Why the hell would regal, pristine Itachi Uchiha want to meet him here?

"Shikamaru."

His attention went to a booth situated back in the corner at the his questions were answered when he met the eyes of not one, but two Uchihases, the younger of which holding a glass beer bottle and looking as if he would rather be anywhere else in the world.

He always looked like that though... If Shikamaru remembered correctly.

He made his way over and pulled up a chair to the edge of the table, setting his drink on the table and making himself comfortable. At least for a second before he received a rough kick to his shin.

His eyes flicked to Sasuke, who only sneered.

"That's for attacking me for no reason, idiot."

"Sasuke..." Itachi sighed, " I already explained to you that he was not in his right mind. Let it go."

The younger just shrugged and shifted sideways on the seat, letting his feet dangle off the side, crossed at the ankles.

The elders attention landed on Shikamaru and he offered a small smile in apology. "He's had a few more than neccesary..." The brothers exchanged glances, seeming to have an entire

conversation with nothing but their eyes, And Itachi finally turned back. "I ran across some interesting information regarding Neji Hyuga. I thought it might be useful to you."

The Nara let his eyes widen, dammit, Neji was out of his life now, And Itachi somehow seemed to inexplicably know everything, so he wasn't going to delude himself by thinking he wasn't aware of the fact. If the sharingan user and also rumored best friend of Hidan really *had* destroyed the psychos residence in an attempt to get them closer, why the hell was he trying to bring his ex back into his life.

Itachi continued, unaware of Shikamaru's suspicion.

"The Hyuga's have a very, very large family tree, generations upon generations. Their heritage is strikingly similar to ours. Ancestors of Neji's have been dated all the way back to before legitimate records had started being kept."

Shikamaru nodded, and actually found this conversation to be rather creepy. It's nice that Itachi cares, really, but doing background checks seemed to be going a little too far.. He grabbed his soda to nonchalantly take a drink, keeping his attention on the older of his two 'friends'.

As if reading his mind, Itachi continued. "I was trying to do more research on your new religion, actually. Seeing as now that you and Hidan are an item, you're going to be a regular part of my life. I wanted to be prepared to deal with two of you cult members running around. That's also why we're in this dingy hole instead of somewhere less, disgusting." His eyes flicked to Sasuke for a second before returning to Shikamaru, a mischevious glint now present. "I tried to contact you yesterday but Hidan was constantly present. Did you have a nice sleepover?"

Shikamaru's stomach lurched and the soda he had in his mouth nearly exploded through his nose. He quickly swallowed the soda,

and that just sent him into a coughing fit after going down the wrong tube.

Sasuke let loose a drunken cackle, and Itachi seemed to be resisting laughter himself.

"You and that psycho? That's gross.." The younger said, suddenly serious as the heart attack Shikamaru wished he could have right now.

"Can we please not talk about it..." He groaned, finally regaining control of himself. "What were you saying about Neji's family history?"

Itachi cleared his throat as well, obviously satisfied enough with the Nara's reaction. "Anyway, I came across something... interesting. It seems to be that one of the Hyuga's, nearly two hundred years ago, was hung after being accused of practicing black magic."

Shikamaru considered this, piecing together everything the ex-Akatsuki member had said.

"You think he was a Jashinist?"

"That would make sense wouldn't it? Seeing that the records show that he did not die."

If he'd dared take another drink, he would have spit it all over the table, probably hitting both the Uchiha's in the process. Luckily enough for him he didn't. All he could do was gawk.

"I do not know if this has any relevance to your situation, but it certainly seems that this god of yours has his sights set on Neji Hyuga. I wasn't able to dig any deeper than that, seeing as any dealings with such things were considered taboo back then. But the fact alone that he could not be killed by any means, even decapitation, it seems, is enough of a reason to look into it." Itachi

said calmly, looking at his nails as if he was as uninterested in the matter as his younger brother seemed.

"Where did you find this information?"

The sharingan user's eyes flicked up to him again, and he shrugged, traces of a smirk etched around his mouth. "Internet."

Shikamaru raised a brow, and Sasuke snickered as a pop and a fizz sounded. He took a quick swig of the beer he'd seemed to acquire out of thin air and wiped his mouth.

"Your honey-boo-boo told 'Tachi about the stuff you looked up. I helped him hack into our neighbors wifi so he could look it up too." Itachi pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed at his brothers confession, and Shikamaru chuckled. Don't dish it out if you can't take it.

"Shoulda seen him Nara," Sasuke said, slurring slightly. "' Which button is the internet? What's a browser? Who's google?' Phuckin pathetic..."

"I'll remind you that I was locked up in solitary confinement for ten years. I haven't exactly had time to sit down and waste my life learning of all this new technology as you have." Itachi snapped, and his brother flipped him off in response. "I think you've had enough." The older said sourly, snatching the now almost empty can from his sibling. Then turned back to Shikamaru wearily. "I apologize. He promised to mind himself if I indulged him."

"It's fine.. it's kinda nice to not see you two acting like robots."

The corner of Itachi's eye twitched, but he seemed to shake the comment off.

"It may or may not link to Hidan. I've never heard of another immortal. Tread carefully Shikamaru, You've gotten yourself into another fine mess." He stood then, and Shikamaru followed suit.

"I'm going to take Sasuke home, I think he's embarrassed himself enough. Oh, and please remove the ring when it's not in use. I prefer not to have any more nightmares."

Shikamaru didn't even have time to blush before Itachi reached across the table and latched onto Sasuke's wrist, both evaporating into a flock of smokey ravens.

He slapped a hand to his forehead and let it slide down his face. *Oh Jashin, could you possibly find any more bullshit to dump on my life?*

He took a slow, deep breath. Well then, at least it was over with. Now it seemed he needed to talk to Hidan, which meant he needed to get home and... and what? Wait... apparently... until his fellow Jashinist returned, which he undoubtedly would.

It.. it was a lot of information to take in. One of Neji's ancestors was an immortal? And Itachi thinks Hidan is linked to it? It couldn't be... could it? It was true that Hidan couldn't remember who he was before immortality kicked in.. But.. He said his appearance had changed as well. They wouldn't have recognized him, not so long ago, as a Hyuga, if he were one...

And even if he were, wouldn't he have the byakugan? Even death shouldn't take that away..

Gah, why was he acting as if he knew how things like this worked?

Baby steps...

He just needed to go home. First things first..

Nope. There was no one here.

Of course there wasn't... He'd told Hidan not to come over when he wasn't here.

He sighed, and quickly yanked the ring off his finger and tossed it tiredly into the small bowl of miscellaneous things that sat on the end table just inside his door, then trudged over to his chair. Collapsing into it, he sat in silence for a moment before pulling out his new pack of cigarretes. After packing them and opening th box, he popped on in his mouth and lit it, inhaling even deeper than usual.

"Mmm..."

He could feel the burn, the protesting of his lungs hurt so good, and the nicotine rushing his system was like a zap of energy, tugging on him and pulling him up from his chair absently.

... Wait... Nicotene doesn't do that...

He blinked, finding himself at the window, having pulled it open and just starting to crouch in order to climb out. What was this?

Again something pulled at him, an indescribable need to leave the apartment. A sudden rush of energy, of *power*.

Uh oh.. This was the same feeling he'd had before. The same rush that drugged his self-awareness and had him wanting to attack Sasuke and kill Neji.

Awe shit, he was having an episode, a Jashin attack. And there hadn't even been anything to bring it on this time!

He blinked again and shook his head, realizing he was on the ledge of the window, and his mouth fell open as he looked down, letting the cigarette fall free down to its doom.

HOLY SHIT! Jashin was trying to kill him! He was useless now that he had nothing to work his evil magic on, he was going to get rid of him amd end the burden and find another way to kill Neji!

He gulped and did his best to keep himself clinging to awareness. He couldn't let his body move on it's own, One more step and he

would be falling again, falling down to the street that was already so broken and crumbled that City workers had closed it off temporarily to traffic.

At least he knew he wouldn't land on his car, but damn it was annoying having to park it around the side of the building...

'Stop resisting..' Came a whisper in his ear.

"Hell no! I already fell off this fucking place once I'm not doing it again! There's no way they'll overlook it a second time!" He panted out loud to the empty air. Someone below seemed to notice him, and had stopped to stare sideways, waiting to see if he was some shmuck trying to commit suicide or just another nutjob. Those were common in the city.

Damn! the ring wasn't on him! He could have called Itachi for help. Fuck, why did he have to remember to take it off? Why couldn't he have remembered last night? And then kept it on today... Shit, he was doomed.

'Stop resisiting...'

"NO!" He shouted, straining as once again the air was forced from his lungs and his eyes widened. There was a small ledge just below his windowsill, and as he panic'd to stay calm and continue fighting the unwilling movement of his body, his leg slowly uncurled from underneath him. So slowly, shaking violently as he willed his muscles to fight back, it continued moving.

Noo... oh please haven't I been doing better? Please don't kill me, please, please, please. I want to live!

Shikamaru's head tilted back, his body was running out of oxygen now, he couldn't do this much longer. His foot firmly planted itself on the outcropping barely big enough to stand sideways on. Damn, he couldn't fight it, he couldn't do it! He was going to pass out soon and

then he really would plummet down to his death. Surely Jashin couldn't manipulate him if he was unconscious...

' Stop resisting...'

He struggled for breath, he struggled not to move, fighting an invisible demon. He couldn't win, there was no way.

Please.. I only just found happiness again.. Show mercy, just this once.. Please Jashin.

He closed his eyes, for fear they might spring a leak again. He couldn't die, not now. He had finally admitted to his feelings for Hidan. He had finally accepted it, He finally had friends and a psycho but amazing boyfriend. He had something to live for again, and now that he had it Jashin was going to take it away? Stupid cruel god, How could you get satisfaction from this...

Suddenly an image of Hidan flashed across his closed lids. They were sitting together on the tarp, that first night after Neji had come, circles made and blood offered and prayers concluded. Hidan looked at him with those unpigmented eyes.

"The first thing you gotta know is that Jashin is a crazy bastard sometimes." He had paused then to say a short apology to his God. "You just gotta trust him. Resisting pisses him off, if he wants you dead, you're gonna die. End of story. You just have to trust that he doesn't."

No.. Shikamaru thought to himself. *I won't let you trick me, I won't let you kill me. Not after everything I've fucking suffered through because of you!* He ripped his eyes open, but as if in a movie theater, Hidan's voice continued, like he'd only turned away from the screen.

"Sometimes he will want you to do things that you're literally thinking 'What the Fuck?' But after it's done you understand. You have to make yourself believe that he will take care of you. Fear is for the

weak, fear is for the mortal. He wants your respect, but he does not want you to fear him, because that causes resistance. He wants undyeing loyalty."

SHUT UP HIDAN! He tried to scream, remembering he had no breath with which to say it. Shit, little black specks were taking over his vision. This was it, in a few seconds he could black out. In a few seconds he would be gone and he would never wake up again. He would be dead, wrapped in the unforgiving cloak of darkness.

Please... He pleaded, feeling a few tears slip down his cheek.
Please don't make me...

"PINEAPPLE HEAD!" Hidan's voice came again, so clear that he might think he was actually standing there on the ledge beside him. "I'M TRYING TO FUCKING HELP YOU HERE! QUIT BEING A DICK!"

Stop it... Stop using him against me. First Neji, and now Hidan. It's not fair.. It's.. it's not..

Oh shit, here it comes, his muscles were going to fail him and he could only begin to fall before unconsciousness would claim his mind, and then the hard ground broke his body.

Taking advantage of his weakness, his other foot jerked out from under him and stepped down to the ledge. His body crouched as he lost control of it, as he lost the ability to fight Jashin's will. Again the power flooded in to him, and he was allowed the smallest intake of breath ever in history.

It almost just made it worse. More! He needed more air or he would die! If Jashin wanted you dead, you were gonna die. It was true, he was defenseless.. He couldn't resist it, it was going to happen no matter what. Either he would die right now of asphyxiation or he could break every bone in his body falling on to the crumpled concrete below.

... Fine.. He surrendered. So be it. If I don't die then you're just going to torture me until I want to. So go ahead, kill me..

The blessed air blew back into him and his lungs inflated. He didn't even go into a coughing fit this time, what with the sudden rush of strength that erupted in his chest. His vision fogged over and he felt that familiar distance, like he was being pulled from his body only to watch.

Great, he got to watch himself die. Where's the popcorn?

His legs burned under him with the strength of coiled wire, and then before he could even register the fact that he was no longer on the windowsill, he had pushed off with such force that the stone that had been holding his weight crumpled and avalanched down the side of the building behind him.

In a heartbeat he had not only jumped across the entire intersection, but landed twice on two more buildings and pushed off, using the chakra in his feet to propel him like some mixture between a cheetah and a kangaroo over the tops of the buildings. He moved so fast that the wind stung his eyes, but holy shit he couldn't close them, this was exhilarating! He had to be moving at least 100mph... He'd never even gone that fast in his car! He didn't know it was possible to move that fast and not have the skin literally ripped from your body.

A small realization snuck into his thoughts as he pushed off from another three roofs. And he closed his eyes, it wasn't as if he were directing himself anyway.

Jashin.. thank you, and I'm sorry. I... I won't do it again. Just please don't try to choke me out any more...

the flashed open to reveal a huge building straight ahead. He was going to crash right through the glass wasn't he? Ah dammit, why did being a Jashinist always involve destruction of property? It was getting really, *really* hard to cover his tracks.

But he didn't go crashing through the window. The people in the conference room inside stared as he thunked into the side, purple-black chakra flaming around his feet to keep it from cracking. He felt his lips part in a sneer at the onlookers before he was running downward at a 90 degree angle. Down, down the side of what was probably a 30 story building, down the glass, past all the offices and workers that either jumped and stared slack-jawed or turned around too slowly to see him sprint by. Down onto the cement ground and without stopping he felt chakra pool into his hand and sharpen into a blade.

An animalistic roar ripped from his throat as he pulled back his arm and swung. And his inner self that was just sitting back watching all this happen gawked as his arm sliced straight through the 6 inch wall of brick and he entered into the large, empty building.

Skidding to a stop, his possessed body fought to feed air to his lungs. Shikamaru willed himself to look around, and his body actually complied while it recovered.

What was this place? It looked to once be some sort of storage facility, it was just a big, bare, empty room. But the walls and the floor were all caked with some disgusting grime, and the smell was nearly unbearable. God, it smelled like the time...

Wait.. It smelled like the hidden Jashinist chamber under Kakuzu and Hidan's house back in that little crap town. As the realization poured into his mind, his body started forward, heading right for the northwest corner with large, hurried strides. It wasn't long before he reached it and Shikamaru looked down, instantly seeing what probably would have been hidden to most people.

On the wall, disguised to look like some sort of graffiti was a Jashin symbol, the outside ring was made by a circling of words. 'Thy will be done.' And there was a large chunk of brick missing from the wall underneath it. He almost laughed to himself as his body reached down without hesitation, tucking his fingers into the crack and pulling. Shikamaru stared in wonder and hesitation and even triumph

as the wall followed the movement, opening up into a door, that led into a pitch black stairwell.

It was then that the anger started trickling into him. And this time he wasn't sure if it was Jashin or not. He could hear Hidan's voice, echoing up to him, rage and psychotic glee both clearly evident.

"You stupid little bitch! You just don't fucking get it do you!?"

Shikamaru stared straight ahead, starting down the flight of stairs and listening to Hidan's rantings.

"You're as good as dead. You fucking lost. there is *nothing* you can do to save yourself now."

Was he sacrificing someone? Damn he better not be.. Even though it was unfair to expect him not to. It was how he stayed alive..

But... but he was killing people Shikamaru. Get a grip! Don't let your affections cloud your judgement.

"You can do whatever the fuck you want to me but JASHIN HAS ALREADY DAMNED YOU! " Insane laughter interrupted the rantings before it was stopped with a pained grunt belonging to the same shouting lunatic.

Anger burst within Shikamaru again. Hidan wasn't sacrificing someone, he was in trouble. Someone was trying to kill *him*! Oh.. Oh hell no!

Fire exploded and suddenly he was sprinting his way down the murky black stairway. Not Hidan, not *his* Hidan. He'd fucking kill them, he'd rip off their limbs and tear out their throat, vampire-style. The idiot deserved to die who thought they could fuck with his man and not have to worry about a pissed off and pumped up Shikamaru coming after them with fangs bared. He'd already had that happen once, and he'd lost Neji because of it. But Hidan was different, Hidan was probably enjoying whatever torture they were currently inflicting,

he was probably getting a kick out of it. And he would get even more of a kick to see his dear Pineapple head bust up in there and crack some fucking skulls.

"GAAHHHOOHH Jashin! Ohh that's so good! " the zealots voice echoed up. FUCK! Why did these fucking hidden chambers have to have these stupidly long fucking pathways? Thankfully there was only one way to go, and not some stupid confusing maze of underground tunnels. But still, it was pissing him off, if it was even possible to be more pissed.

He understood now, what Jashin had wanted him to do. It was a rescue mission. Hidan was in trouble, and Shikamaru had become the new Kakuzu. Reaching in and plucking the idiots ass out of danger at the last second.

Well, Technically Kakuzu had waited until he was dead already. But, he wasn't Kakuzu, he was Shikamaru Nara. He was but he wasn't. He wasn't an easy-going, cloud-gazing, lump of flesh and bone anymore. He was a badass, ass-kicking Jashinist that could fall from ten story buildings and not get hurt, that could sprint across rooftops at an impossible speed. The only thing that remained the same about him now was his name.

And he was going to carve it into the back of this stupid fuck's eyelids.

There was light peeking out around a large rectangle up ahead. Shikamaru squinted to see it better. A door? Who the hell would put a door way the hell down here? You'd think that nifty little secret entrance up all those stairs would be enough to deterr anyone, it wasn't as if an old wodden door would do anything but maybe add a little homeliness.

He strided up to it and in one motion pured charkra into his foot and kicked it open with all the force he had. The door not only opened, but flew off its hinges and sailed across the open room and crashed into the wall. Hidan shouted some startled profanity, and Shikamaru

felt an maniacle smile stretch it's way across his face. He cracked his neck and stepped into the room.

His lungs protested against breathing in the dust that the whole door situation had stirred up, but he ignored it and squinted through the smokescreen. His fists clenched at his side and he stalked in further.

"Pineapple head? What the fuck!?" Hidan said, and Shikamaru's eyes flicked over to where the voice came from. His eyes only narrowed in further wrath as he took in the situation.

Hidan was tied up, and tied up well. He was suspended in the middle of the room with his hands down at his sides and his ankles secured together, toes dangling just a few inches from the ground. He had cuts and slashes all over him, his hair was disheveled, and blood was trickling from his mouth and nose.

A series of weapons were shoved through him in various places, and Shikamaru noticed a few metallic zip-strips around all four of his limbs and his neck. Chakra-blocking metal, he concluded, remembering the handcuffs he'd used on Sasuke. It would be kind of hot if the Nara wasn't currently pissed to all hell.

Hidan stared back at him, the emotion on his face indescribable, though Shikamaru's ego attributed it maybe to awe, seeing as the albinos mouth was hanging slightly open.

"What the fuck is going on here?" He said, hardly recognizing his own snarl of a voice.

Hidan's mouth bobbed open and close, violet eyes like saucers as they looked Shikamaru up and down. He just huffed, obviously that idiot wasn't going to be much help, so he tore his eyes from the pitiful scene and looked around. The room looked almost as if it had been an apartment, but a bomb went off inside. The walls were scorched and what looked to be furniture was laying broken and splintered in small bits and chunks all over the room. Everything was

burnt to a crisp, except the small blanket that lay unrolled on the floor with all manner of torture devices organized neatly on it.

Hacksaws, drills, scalpels, bludgeons, maces, whips, lock-cutters... What the hell was this? Someone was literally planning to torture Hidan.

An impossible amount of further anger enveloped him to the point where he was just going to start using Hidan for a punching bag if this person didn't show themselves soon. If he didn't maim or kill something within the next five seconds...

"Shikamaru...?"

His chest clenched up and he turned slowly, grinding his teeth with eyes wide open in shock and rage. That voice, that *stupid fucking voice*... Oohh Jashin if *he* was behind this again.. he really might kill him. He really might just sacrifice his meddling, jealous, over-dramatic *cunt* of a soul.

Pale blue-gray eyes stared at him in confusion, silky brunette hair cascaded down his shoulders, out of its usual ponytail and let free to flow where it wanted. He was beautiful still.. or he would be, if not for the blood, blood that he knew was Hidan's, splattered across his clothes and his face, caking his right arm that held an equally bloody dagger. The sacrificial dagger Hidan had been showing Shikamaru only yesterday.

Son of a bitch.

"What.. what are you doing here? How'd you find this place?"

He took a step toward Neji, letting his killing intent flow like a waterfall from his eyes. He wanted the Hyuga to look into them and see his own death. He had nowhere to run this time, they were down here in this darky, dirty hole. In the same situation as two years ago, only the roles had been reversed and there was no Itachi Uchiha here to keep the peace.

"He's trying to kill me or some shit. Fucking idiot." Hidan finally spoke up, and Shikamaru's gaze only flicked to him long enough to give him a glare that commanded silence, before returning to Neji.

Neji stared back, unable to completely conceal his fear. "You.. you're having another fit aren't you?" He hesitated, waiting for an answer, as if Shika cared enough to give him one. "Shikamaru! Wake up! It's me!"

You little fucking rat. His eyes narrowed further, how dare he still try to play innocent. How dare he try to use Shikamaru's feelings against him. He left. He LEFT! Twice now! He left him alone, and now he was trying to act as if there was still any fucks left for shikamaru to give. He was torturing the man who had taken Neji's place and sitting there acting as if there was nothing wrong with this, as if the spikey haired Jashinist in front of him would just immediately choose his side without even having to think about it as long as he was in his right mind.

I could kill you. He took another step. *So easily. I could crush your pretty little head with my new strength.*

More maniacal laughter rang out in the cave-like room. "You're FUCKED now princess! Oooh shit look at that! Pineapple head is PISSED! You better fucking run you worthless little athiest! Run for your pathetic little life!"

Neji looked back and forth between the the insane, laughing man and Shikamaru, desperation slowly overtaking his features. He took a step back, his breaths beginning to come faster.

"Shikamaru.. you don't understand. I can explain you just have to give me the chance."

"Shut up." The Nara growled, once more shocked to hear the ferocity in his voice. "I'm going to kill you.."

Hidan whooped at this and doubled his laughter, and Neji looked as if he'd been kicked in the crotch and then stabbed in the back.

"SHIKAMARU! WAKE UP!" He shouted, tears starting to pool in his beautiful, lying eyes.

"REPENT HEATHEN!" Hidan shrilled, struggling against his restraints.

Shikamaru blocked it out, gathering his chakra. This was going to be put to a stop, right now. He had a choice to make. Neji or Hidan. The man he had loved for nearly 6 years of his life, who had left him and betrayed him. Or the man he wasn't sure if he loved or not who had taken Neji's place and stopped his heart from bleeding, the one who had previously tried to murder not only Shikamaru himself, but Neji as well.

Tough choice.

Not really.

A/N-

dives behind a bookcase DON'T KILL ME! You should be well aware of how evil I am by now. Cliffhangers are just irresistible. xD

Yeesss, Jashin is a cruel, heartless bastard. And I love him. So, will Shika actually go through with it this time? Has Jashin gained enough power over him to force him to do it?

YOU WON'T KNOW UNTIL THE NEXT CHAPTER
BWAAHAHAHAHAHAHA!

Which Imma start working on right away. :)

So yea, I warned you that shit was gonna hit the fan. But seriously folks, theres still a good bit of the story left, and it only gets more

wild, so please for the love of Jashin, put on your seatbelts.

This chapter is irritating me. I feel like I got a little crazy with the one sentence paragraphs. But at the same time I can't mesh them together without it sounding.. just not right, in my head. So, forgive me for that, forgive me for typos. Um, I had a playlist written up somewhere around here but I can't for the fuck of me think of where the hell I put it so.. I guess this sentence was pointless. :D

Anywayyy, I lovvvvveee yooouuuu, Jashin loves you, and if you review I'll give you a fresh-made soul cookie! So.. like... review.

Like now.

Go.

No rest for the wicked

Recurring Nightmares

"You wake up!" Shikamaru shouted suddenly. "Have you lost your fucking mind Neji? Trying to take on Hidan? Going against me? Against Jashin!?" His teeth were bared as he shouted, Hidan had gone blessedly silent, but he could still *feel* that grin boring into him. "Do you have ANY idea how outmatched you are here? *I* can barely handle it, you don't stand a snowballs chance in hell!"

"Shikamaru.. I have no choice.." Neji said, timid but still with determination.

"YOU ALWAYS HAD A CHOICE! I FUCKING MADE SURE YOU DID!" Shikamaru screamed, unable to contain his fury any longer. He charged, dark chakra lighting up his hands. Neji evaded his first three swings, thankfully the Hyuga was as nimble as ever. And his anger was making Shikamaru less focused. He didn't care about anything, he couldn't see anything but red. He couldn't fight Jashin's pull on him, his not-so-discreet nudges. It wasn't his fault, he was always fighting, always. He never seemed to get a break. His mind was running out of fuel to resist, and Neji just kept re-appearing, fucking *everything* up that he was struggling so hard for.

He had protected the brunette for so long, he had done everything he could, every burden that he could take off Neji's shoulders, he'd done so without complaint. He had bound Hidan to him, bound himself to Jashin all for the sake of protecting this fucking annoying /bug/ that refused to buzz off. The dumbass just kept running right back into danger every time Shikamaru managed to tuck him safely away in a dark corner.

Well, fine. If he wanted to be a thrill-seeker, let him. If he wanted to find out about the evil Shikamaru had been sheilding him from, he'd show Neji *personally*.

He lunged again, swinging his leg around in a kick and following it with a series of jabs that were too fast to see. Neji dodged and blocked all of them, impressing Shikamaru for only a second. Neji's agility and ability to block any physical attack was pretty much the foundation as well as the length of his abilities. As long as Shikamaru kept him from cutting off his chakra flow eventually he would foul up, and with Shikamaru's seizure-causing attacks, one hit was all it would take.

"YEEAH! Fuck him up Pineapple head!" Hidan howled, still struggling to break free.

"Shikamaru! Please!" Neji panted, byakugan activated eyes letting his desperation to stop this fight show clearly. "I have to figure out how to kill him! If I don't get rid of his immortality then I'll just keep getting attacked for the rest of my life!"

These words broke through the Nara's blind fury and he paused for only a second, before delivering a powerful blow that sent Neji skidding in reverse until his back 'thumped' against the disgusting cement wall.

He lowered his arms and stared at Shikamaru, pleading him just to listen without saying words.

"Why?" The unbound Jashinist growled, forcing his body not to continue the attack.

"Because, it's a debt that's due to be settled." Neji panted, clutching as his shoulder. "I did some research after our talk. I found some information online that convinced me to give my family a visit. I spoke with one of the oldest living members of my clan, and he told me of a tall tale that had been passed down in the form of a story meant to scare kids into behaving." The Hyuga explained quickly, voice shaking.

Shikamaru continued listening, his interest overcoming the anger.

"GODDAMIT PINEAPPLE HEAD JUST KILL HIM ALREADY AND GET ME THE FUCK DOWN!"

"SHUT UP!" He shouted back to his fellow desciple. This kind of information was what he wanted all along. It could explain so many things, Hidan's previous life and everything that's happened since, for one. And also why the hell the psycho had been introduced into their lives in the first place.

"Immortality is a gift that your dumb God granted to one of my ancestors a looong time ago." Neji continued slowly, his eyes shifting back and forth between the two cult members, his stance still defensive. "In exchange for eternal life, he not only had to sacrifice the souls of random strangers, but of the firstborn son of every generation of our clan from that point on. Killing someone he loved was the ultimate offering..."

Shikamaru continued staring, still trying to hold on to his smouldering anger should he need the extra boost. Though now that he was thinking clearly, his desire to injure Neji was shrinking with every passing second. Kill him? How could he ever want to do such a thing. Yes, the brunette kept appearing at the worst time, he kept thrusting himself back into danger. But he could never end his life... At least not without Jashin cutting off his sanity.

"It's me, Shikamaru.. I really don't know where *he* fits into the situation, but regardless of who accepts the gift, the price must be paid. I don't know why it still targets our clan, because I looked up our records. The immortal of my family was finally killed, and yet the first male born of every new generation for two hundred years has ended up dieing in some way." Neji paused to catch his breath, tears rimming his eyelids. His voice was starting to crack from the strain of explaining. "My family hides it, it's like some dirty little secret. You have no idea what I had to go through to get them to show me. But that's the facts Shikamaru... If he doesn't die, then I have too."

There it was, the ultimatum that Shika had been fearing. He really did have to choose. Save Hidan or save Neji.

Dammit.. Why couldn't he have known this information two years ago when it wouldn't have even been difficult to decide.

Hidan was basically just a soul possessing a body. Without Jashin's immortality he would cease to exist. There was no way to keep them both alive. But.. the way Neji was explaining it, even if Hidan did die, then someone else would just inherit Hidan's ability, and the process would start all over again.

But.. He'd stopped Hidan so far. Why couldn't things just stay the way they were? He could keep being Hidan's guardian, keeping him alive but restrained.

"Hidan is under my control. I have prevented him from killing you before and I can keep doing it as long as necessary." He said firmly, glaring at his ex. "I have things under control, if you would stop meddling, it would be a lot easier for you to stay alive."

The look of betrayal on Neji's face was bitter-sweet. "Shikamaru, I don't want to have to worry about my life every second of the day. I want to live like a normal person! How am I supposed to stop being crazy like this if I have to constantly keep an eye out for people trying to kill me? How will I know if every stranger that meets my eyes isn't out to get me? He had me turned against myself, He's even got you trying to kill me now!"

... The Nara remained silent, trying to urge his brain to work faster. There had to be a solution... *There had to be.*

It was true, he couldn't expect Neji to be able to enjoy the life he was spared knowing that any moment he could die. That was probably the exact reason the Hyuga elders had decided to keep it a secret, they probably covered up every single murder, making it look like a different cause of death every time to keep suspicion down. So that the victims could at least enjoy the time they had...

But.. he couldn't lose Hidan. He couldn't take it. He'd rather die than suffer through that loneliness and pain again. He would accept

Jashin if he had to, abandon his plan to escape the demon god's influence, as long as he could find some kind of stalemate.

"You said he had to kill someone he loved?" He finally forced out, and received a cautious nod from Neji, who was studying him with suspicious eyes.

He could use that, couldn't he? Maybe he could make a bargain, he could take the curse onto himself, free the Hyuga's of it. He could hold his own against Hidan, keep him alive by fighting him off every day. It would work, as long as Jashin would accept..

And as long as he could be sure about how the zealot felt about him..

It was the key component, it seemed. Which was ridiculous to him, but made sense at the same time. Why was everything always centered around love? God it was just an emotion! But apparently such a strong one that it literally was a delicacy to Jashin.

Or perhaps it was the heartbreak caused from the betrayal that he fed on.

Shikamaru turned to eye Hidan, who stared back with an unreadable expression. Damn, before he could solve this he would have to go to a really uncomfortable level with the Jashinist. And with Neji here there was even less chance of it working, the zealot would cling to his dignity until he died. Even if Hidan *did* feel that way about him, it would never be admitted out loud. He hadn't even said it about Kakuzu, and it was obvious that the older man had been his entire world outside of Jashin.

And honestly, he didn't want to ask. Because he didn't want to have to admit his own feelings either. He still wasn't sure of them yet. Enough time hadn't passed for him to be able to make a logical decision not based purely of fleeting emotions and chemical reactions.

"Shikamaru.. I have to. I'm not even asking you to do it. I respect you and the disgusting way you seem to feel about him. I hate the situation, but I can't hate you... But.. you have to let me. You and I both know I can't beat you.."

"No shit!" Hidan suddenly piped up. "That's what I've been fucking telling you since day one! Your soul already belongs to Jashin, it's just the fucking matter of plucking it out of your useless body! And it's starting to become a really fucking annoying goddamn hassle!"

Shikamaru blinked slowly and took a deep breath. "Asking me to let you kill him..." He said, trailing off and letting his eyes reopen. Damn, his erethral anger was gone, all that was left was the hopeless frustration he was all-too-familiar with. Dammit, why did he always have to think about things? He almost wished he *would* just hurry up and lose his mind. Hidan really had been smarter than him, since the very beginning. Not careing, keeping your standards low, keeping yourself detached, it was the easiest way. Learning to enjoy the pain, inner and outer alike, learning to turn your sadness into evil glee was the only way to spare yourself the heartbreak.

"... Is no different than me letting him kill you." He finally concluded.

Neji flinched at this. "How can you say that? You love me! Or at least you used to! We dedicated nearly 6 years of our lives to each other, we've been through so much. *He's* the one who ruined it! Even now he's still destroying everything, even the tiny bit that we still have left." Neji stepped forward, his hand flexing. Shikamaru saw it, but did not take any action. Neji was getting brave, apparently, he was moving toward his little weapon stash, trying to keep his ex focused on him with his little speech.

"You said yourself that it's only been a few weeks. Shikamaru, I know you're not dumb enough to let your emotions make you impulsive. Use that beautiful brain of yours, it's all a setup from his stupid God!" He said, jerking his head toward the restrained albino. " It's an illusion! You're playing right into his trap! Once I'm dead he's going to drop you."

Shikamaru flinched as he heard someone scream, only realizing it was himself when his hands yanked at his head and he realized he was doubled over. "SHUT UP!" his voice screamed without his permission. This.. this wasn't a Jashin attack. This was different..

This really was a mental breakdown, he could almost feel his last thread of sanity snapping.

"EVERYONE JUST SHUT UP! ALL OF YOU!" He wailed, almost unable to keep himself standing. "I'm so SICK of being in the middle of this stupid tug of war! DAMMIT NEJI! You ended things, you ended them twice! MAKE UP YOUR MIND! Maybe Hidan is a psycho but at least he isn't playing these fucking mind games with me!"

The Hyuga was paralyzed in shock and terror.

"Every fucking day it's back and forth, back and forth. I don't even know who I am anymore! Do you two even realize what you're doing to me? *YOU'RE* the ones forcing me into this trap!" He was breathing heavily, and Neji shifted, Shikamaru could almost sense his intentions. He was going to make a go for it, as soon as Shikamaru was confused again.

"But I'm not going to let you do it to me anymore. You want to try to kill him, you're going to have to go through me." He growled, and Neji spared one more lasting gaze before he darted forward.

In a split second he was racing across the unrolled cloth, snatching up some kind of sword-like weapon without losing momentum. In that same second Shikamaru was after him, using his precious, exceedingly small amount of chakra to push him faster. Just a hair faster than Neji, that was all he needed to be and he could stop him.

Jashin's power flooded back into him in such a dizzying wave that it almost physically hurt. And he heard himself snarling like some animal as he pushed forward in slow motion. In less than a second Neji would reach Hidan, he had no idea what he planned to do,

probably cut off his head and make a run for it. And he didn't know if he could still catch him after that, Neji had always been just that miniscule little bit faster than him, even with his own chakra boosting him, even with Jashin's help, he always managed to stay just out of his reach.

He was right there, the brunette's hand extended out toward an equally animalistic Hidan, those wicked fang-like teeth bared and lashing out like a dog backed into a corner, fighting for his life until the very end.

With one last burst he lunged.

He could do it right now, he could just let Jashin take over, he could catch Neji and snap his neck and have the problem taken care of. He had no choice left, not with the options he'd been given. He was too far gone to side with Neji now, Jashin and Hidan alike both had left such deep impressions on his heart and soul, overshadowing the bruises that Neji had left.

He.. he had to. He had to kill him...

Dammit.. he couldn't do it himself... he couldn't live with it. He had to let go, he had to give the demon god the reigns and turn away. Close his eyes and plug his ears and turn a blind eye to the things the omnipotent being would surely make him do. Hidan did it, and so could he.

As least, he could have.

Before something was suddenly shoved through his flesh. Before a terrible all consuming pain engulfed him.

He heard himself grunt as his body collapsed to the ground, he heard Neji shriek something that sounded like his name. He heard Hidan roar in even more fury than he'd had before.

He looked down as his chest before collapsing to his knees.

Awe.. shit..

The weapon Neji had been holding was sticking out of him, only the handle visible. It had gone clean through him... He knew without looking that the bloody blade was sticking out the other side.

He tried to speak, but a warm liquid was spurting from his mouth, running down his chin and dripping down onto his shirt every time he tried. Blood, is what it was.. He was vomiting his own blood.. The sword had pierced his lung, if not his heart.

"Shh... SHIKAMARU!" Neji shrieked again, falling down beside him but not touching him, afraid to. "I.. no! NO! I'm so sorry! You.. you jumped in front of me! I couldn't stop! NOO!"

As he struggled to breathe, to get a clean breath in and not choke on the blood rushing his body, He looked up at Neji, tears pouring out of him now. "Get... out..." He gurgled, clutching at his wound. Ohh *Fuuuck* that hurt so bad.

Neji looked at him in horror, and then looked up at Hidan. Before he could even think about it his hand shot out and grabbed Neji by the collar of his shirt, pulling him so close that their noses almost touched. With every ounce of hatred he could pull from himself, he glared. "Or I swear to Jashin..." More blood spurted from his mouth as he talk, spattering onto Neji's face. The brunette was petrified, unable to even react.

"I will pull this sword out right now and end your fucking life."

"But.. you'll die.." The byakugan user whispered, so quiet that Shikamaru had to be the only one hear heard, and only just barely. More tears gushed out and he started taking short, quick breathes, his entire body shaking violently as the realization sank into him. The realization that he might have killed Shikamaru.

Growling from the fresh stab of pain from every single movement, from the unbelievable amount of agony caused from just trying to

keep his uninjured lung inflated, he shoved Neji weakly backward. Unable to fight back, the Hyuga fell to his ass, mouth opening and closing like a fish out of water.

Finally, after an eternity-long staring match, he sobbed and scrambled to his feet. His hair swirled around behind him as he dashed from the room, and Shikamaru stayed still until he no longer heard the soft tapping of his feet going up the stairwell.

"Shikamaru.. I can't get out. You have to cut a few of these fucking ropes!" Hidan said, his voice quaking in a way the Nara had never heard before. This topped with Hidan using his actual name helped him force himself up, screaming bloody murder as he did.

"Just get my hand free and I can do it!" the fellow disciple shouted, the strain of mild panic in his voice all but overwhelming for the Nara. If Hidan was freaking out, then shit had officially just got serious.

Nearly choking on the blood forcing its way up his trachea and out his mouth with every single agonizing breath he took, He forced his hand onto the hilt of the sword-like weapon.

This was going to hurt like a bitch.

Again his scream nearly deafened him as he forced all the chakra he could spare into his arm and yanked the weapon out. The noise didn't stop as he used the momentum from it to bring the object over his head, ignoring the warmth spreading far too quickly from the wound down his stomach.

Don't think about it. Don't think about it. Don't think about it.

He couldn't let the thought of his death into his mind. Or he wouldn't even have the chance to get Hidan free, thus creating an opportunity for the zealot to save his life.

He slashed downward, and the blade easily sliced through the ropes. In a heartbeat he heard the thunk of Hidan's feet hitting the floor, he

heard the man run over to where he assumed the collection of torture devices was. He heard the snapping of metal as the albino cut the zip-strips from himself, and then the whole world spun and his stomach heaved as he was scooped up into a pair of strong arms.

"Hang on Pineapple head. I got this." Hidan's distant voice muttered to him.

Awe shit.. He couldn't see... He knew his eyes were open but he could only see darkness. He was going to die.. Neji killed him. And not even on purpose.

Ohhhh, the irony...

"Tug me... to the fucking hospital..." He breathed out, gargling even more blood. It felt like an earthquake was going on around him, he was being jostled around so much from Hidan sprinting up the stairs. It was insane, this situation. How the hell had it come to this? He finally gets his first serious injury after gaining his super healing powers and of course it just has to be a fatal one.

Damn, dying really should be more scary than this. Why wasn't he freaking out? Had he got it all out of his system earlier?

He didn't even feel bad for threatening Neji's life... repeatedly. After all, he'd just shoved a fucking sword through his chest.. He let out a small gurgle of a laugh. Shikamaru could call it even...

He groaned when light suddenly blinded him and with a huge effort managed to roll his head over, letting it rest against Hidan's chest. Huh.. That was weird, he didn't remember Hidan having a black shirt.. In fact he was pretty sure he hadn't been wearing a shirt at all...

Oohh.. he inwardly laughed, unable to muster the strength to actually do it. Hidan was in ritual mode.. That was his skin.. That made sense.. It must be why he was so calm right now, why he was still conscious even though the pain from all this movement should

probably caused him to pass out by now. He was feeling what the zealot was, which didn't make sense in a way... Because he wasn't angry at all. He wasn't worried for his own well-being. All he knew is he wished everything would stop twisting and bouncing and jerking around. He couldn't get his eyes to focus.. in fact it felt like they might be closed...

He tried to sigh, but he couldn't take in anything more than a small amount of air into his battered body, so he just smiled.

Everything was okay.. Hidan would take care of him, just like he had before when he'd gotten an infection. Jashin would help him out too, he was a good little follower.. he deserved as much. There was no way the slaughter God wanted him to die, he was too useful. Especially after this.

This was good, everything was good. Dying wasn't so bad...

A whoosh of air escaped blue lips. Black doe-like eyes scanned the area boredly as he walked calmly along, ignoring the varied reactions of passers-by purely out of habit. The tall muscular man had grown used to it, being stared at like some freak. He'd learned long ago to tune out the whispered without even having to think about it. They weren't even worth the effort.

Shark-like teeth peeked out of his mouth as he sneered at his surroundings.

Damn it all, Itachi *had* to be here somewhere. He'd tracked him to this city now, after ending up in the wrong place on three seperate occasions. So he wasn't the best tracker... Oh well. He knew without a doubt that he'd gotten it right this time. He could *smell* Uchiha all over this neighborhood.

He froze in his tracks as a familiar chakra pattern tickled at his awareness. It wasn't Itachi, he knew that much right away, but it was

someone from the Akatsuki. Someone he'd been around enough for his subconscious to recognize even before he did.

Looking up purely out of coincidence, he spotted them. A black blur shooting like a rocket across the street, running along the rooftops. Without even considering it, he pushed off to follow them, ignoring the startled gasps and screams as his large form shoved his way through bodies until he came to a wall. In three easy leaps he was on top of the single-story building and in pursuit of the person that he knew but couldn't quite think the name of.

It wasn't Itachi, this much he knew. But he knew that this person was an Akatsuki member, or a former one at least, even though technically once you were in, you were in for life. And if this person had been in their little club, then it was likely that they knew where the Uchiha was lurking. It had to be more than coincidence that they were in the same town.

OH WAIT! He knew who it was, he realized as he ever so slowly began catching up with the blurr of a person. It was that shit-for-brains immortal that itachi was always babysitting! Hidan! Right!

Why the hell was he all black like that?

Hmm... oh yeah, he had some weird jutsu or something that turned him different colors. He used it to kill people... That was what had caused that whole fiasco in that little town so long ago. Damn that place had been a shithole, he much preferred the city. They should definitely start up some kind of Akatsuki branch here.

The ritualistic Hidan suddenly swerved to the right and he adjusted his course samely. It also brought his thoughts back on topic.

So Hidan was here, and in a giant hurry, and had his weird jutsu activated that he only used to kill people... So.. was he chasing someone? Or trying to escape a crime scene?

Again a sneer stretched across his face, gleaming, vicious-looking teeth peeking through his pale blue lips.

Ahh, Hidan was killing again. And he had practically caught him in the act.

Ohoho, this was perfect. This would be his last strike, if he recalled correctly, before Leader was going to destroy him. That meant that Itachi could stop running off after him. Honestly he was getting tired of coming home to notes.

Kisa- Sent after Hidan again, taking Sasuke. Don't know how long I'll be gone. I'll call you.

Yeah.. right. He'd sat by that stupid phone for 3 days straight and not gotten anything. A week later he hadn't even received a voicemail. And now after three more had passed he was pretty well done waiting. Akatsuki was important, Itachi's little brother could also be considered important, he supposed... But dammit so was he!

Ah shit.. his mind was wondering again...

SEE WHAT YOU DO TO ME YOU GODDAMN UCHIHA!?

It was then that Hidan leaped up, jumping from the three story building they were on all the way over the street and landing on the ten story, sprinting vertically with crimson chakra flames enveloping his feet. He skidded to a stop as the ebony albino gracefully stopped at the 8th floor and swung himself into an open window with the ledge broken off. Since when did Hidan have red chakra? And since when could he do useful things with it?

Black eyes scanned the area, navy-colored eyebrows raising. What the fuck? It looked like a freaking war zone around here! Giant craters in the streets, caution tape and roadblocks all around.. He smiled even more.

Oh, Nagato was going to be PISSED!

Chuckling darkly to himself he stepped casually off the building and with graceful chakra pulsations landed, unhurt, on the sidewalk below. He put his hands in his pocket and made his way across the street, whistling to himself. He didn't need to go jumping through windows, he was pretty sure Hidan hadn't noticed that someone was tailing him, the moron. You'd think someone trying to escape a crime scene would be a little more aware, but.. he *was* an idiot. Why the hell Itachi put up with him was faaar beyond his own comprehension.

xx

Alright, 8th floor. The window Hidan had jumped in was on the east side, so this had to be it. Apartment 420. He paused long enough to put an ear to the door. Hmm, no sound. No crashing or shattering or shouting swear-words. How very un-Hidan-like.

Oh well, he'd be pissed enough when he found out he'd been caught.

A blue fist lifted to knock against the door rather roughly, and he laughed inwardly when Hidan's voice exploded from behind the closed door.

"NO ONE'S FUCKING HOME! GO AWAY!"

Nice, very convincing. Yeah he would totally just turn and walk away, cause there was obviously no one home.

"Open up!" He barked, slamming his fist onto the door repeatedly. "This is the police! We have a warrant!"

"FUCK OFF!"

He looked at the three numbers on the door in confusion now. That was weird. Hidan wasn't freaking out... Once more he knocked, then took a step back, ready to kick the door down when suddenly he heard a lot of thrunking and crashing and long strings of swearing that grew louder and louder, accompanied by heavy footsteps.

Grinning once more he coiled his body, listening to Hidan's threats to 'sacrifice the everloving piss out of whoever had enough fucking nuts to bug him right now'. And when the door was thrown open he pounced, laughing out loud at the expression on the once-again-albino's face.

They crashed to the floor and he was knee'd in the gut with much more strength than he ever remembered this guy having, and he flipped back to his feet after it sent him rolling across the bloody floor. Oh gross, why the hell was there blood all over the floor!? Oh GROSS! Hidan was covered in blood too! Awee dammit it was all over him now too!

"Are you fucking KIDDING ME! Get the hell out of here Shark-dick I'm fucking busy!" Hidan shouted, not even taking a defensive stance as Kisame crouched to pounce again.

"Oh I know you are. I saw you running off with your wierd fucking ritual all activated. I'm here to bring you in." He pulled the shortsword from the hidden hilt on his back and swung.

Hidan only sidestepped, his face nearly turning red. "You dumb fucker I'm not kidding, just fuck off for a few minutes! I don't have time for this right now!"

He was just about to stop playing games and restrain Hidan when he heard cough that had most certainly not come from the man in front of him. His dark eyes met violet, and his weapon lowered. It wasn't just a cough, it was a wet, nasty cough that sounded like whoever made it was probably dieing.

No wayyyy, he actually brought the person he was sacrificing back to his *house*! Oohh, Hidan.. He really had no brains at all.

"HEY WAIT STAY THE FUCK OUTTA THERE!" Hidan shouted just as Kisame whirled and darted down the hall. He was grabbed by the shoulder and yanked backward, but a quick elbow to Hidan's face

knocked him loose and the shark-like man was off again, bursting through the door and coming to an abrupt halt.

He stared at the strange sight, before turning back to give Hidan a quizzical look. The albino was collecting himself from the floor and repositioning his nose. In a moment he was up and shoving Kisame to the side so he could get into the room as well.

The blue man was officially fucking confused now. Like... really.

"Well... don't just fucking stand here help me out! Can you fix a lung? I think his lung is fucked but I don't know what to do..."

"Hob-zi-duull.." The spikey haired, profusely bleeding man on the bed gurgled.

"Uhhh..." Kisame said dumbly. He knew that kid.. That was the guy that got his house all fucked up by Sasuke, the one Hidan and Kakuzu used to live next to. Oh shit.. wait a second here... That was the kid that buried him two years ago with Itachi's help.

What the fuck was he doing here? And why the fuck was Hidan trying to help him?

"GODDAMMIT!" Hidan said, suddenly spinning on his heel and shoving his fist through the wall. He yanked it out and without missing a beat stalked up to Kisame, looking the taller man in the eyes with a glare so fiery that Kisame might have shrank back a little despite being almost six inches taller. "What the fuck are you doing here!? Where the fuck is red-eyes? Go fucking get him, he'd be more useful than your big stupid blue ass!"

"What the hell is going on here?" He finally forced out.

"WHAT'S IF FUCKING LOOK LIKE? JASHIN CHRIST AND PEOPLE SAY I'M DUMB!"

"I don't know what the hell this looks like! Why is he here? I thought you hated him!"

"Shut up! GAH! FUCK! I can't do this shit right now Shark-dick, seriously!"

Sighing in irritation, Kisame made his way around the side of the bed and leaned over. The kid.. Whatever his name was, looked pretty far gone. His wound was really, *really* bad. His lung had to be collapsed, without a doubt. And he'd lost so much blood that his skin was nearly the color of paper. He was fighting for air, his eyes were unfocused and dialated all to hell, and Kisame leaned back up, rubbing his chin in thought.

When he finally looked up to Hidan, who was staring at him in desperation smothered by anger, he blinked slowly and took a breath. "There's nothing you can do about something like this. It's a miracle that he's still alive. What the hell happened?"

"That's none of your business." Hidan stated slowly, his gaze set on the dying person wheezing on the bed. Kisame was unsure what to make of the psycho right now, he seemed very unlike himself. It only added further confusion to the matter. He'd only ever seen Hidan show concern for someone when Kakuzu was hurt, and it was only a fraction of what this was. Finally violet eyes turned to focus on him.

"Why the hell are you even here?"

Shifting in the uncomfortable atmosphere, Kisame reached up to scratch behind his neck. "Well I was looking for Itachi, I had something important to tell him.." He paused for a minute, tapping an index finger against his chin. "What was that... hmmm."

Hidan rolled his eyes. "I thought he was the one following me. If I knew if was your stupid ass I would've tried harder to lose you. I was hoping he could help.."

"Aah, so you *did* know I was there! And here I was thinking I could ambush you and drag you back to Leader so he could rip you to peices." He ignored the grimace Hidan made and continued on before the vulgar mouth could spit any more stupidity at him. "Anyway, I figured you'd know where Itachi was, seeing as he's supposed to be babysitting you again. So where is he?"

"HE'S NOT MY FUCKING BABYSITTER AND I DON'T FUCKING KNOW!"

"Hey now, " Kisame laughed, putting his arms up in mock surrender. "Don't be such a grouch!"

"Of course I'm gonna be fucking *grouchy* when you come banging on the fucking door pretending to be the police like a fucking moron with I'm in the fucking middle of trying to save Pineapple head's life! How the hell do people consider you more mature than me!? Get the hell out you retarded shark-son-of-a-bitch!"

"Yeahh.. He's as good as dead. Don't get so worked up." Suddenly the blue man reeled backward, his back smashing against the wall and stars twinkling around his vision. He looked up, holding a hand over his jaw, more surprised than angry.

"What part of 'This is fucking serious' don't you understand?" Hidan growled, standing over him and popping his knuckles.

"Damn! Okay, chill out. Why is this kid so important?" Hoshigaki said, straightening up. That really caught him off guard... and really hurt. Damn. He *seriously* didn't remember little Hidan packing that much of a punch.

"It's a long fucking story. One that you have no business knowing. I'm not fucking doing anything wrong so get the hell out."

"The.. rigg."

Both men froze in place and snapped their heads over to the man on the bed. His voice was considerably less ragged, even though he still seemed to be having trouble speaking. And to both of their amazement it almost seemed as if the bleeding had stopped.

Kisame felt his eyes narrow. "..The *what?*"

"Itagee... gach... me a rigg. S'awn the tahble... by the dorr."

Hidan's face suddenly brightened up and he whirled around. "Oh yeah! I forgot about that fucking thing!"

"Forgot about what?" Kisame asked again, what the hell? He could fucking understand what the kid was saying.. But His questions were answered in another heartbeat as Hidan walked back through the door and tossed a small, shiney object at him. He caught it strickly from reflex, then opening his palm and staring down at it.

It was just a little silver ring..

OOHH! A *ring!* That's what he said!

He looked back up to find Hidan leaning over the bedridden person whose name he still couldn't remember, inspecting his wound cautiously. Interested, he mimiced the action, clicking his tongue.

That was seriously some crazy shit right there. That kid shouldn't be alive right now with an injury like that, let alone paying attention to their conversation and responding. The gaping hole seemed to have indeed stopped bleeding, without even being wrapped or tended to in the slightest. The only person he'd ever seen heal from lethal injuries like that was the only person he'd ever met that could have his head cut off and still carry on an arguement as if nothing had happened.

Is that why Hidan was so interested in this guy? He was obviously not human, Not that the shark-like man had any room to talk... but

still, even he couldn't be able to recover from that. Even Kakuzu himself only had one set of lungs...

Hmm.. speaking of Kakuzu..

"OH!" He suddenly piped up, making Hidan jump and the kid with the ponytail twitch. "I remember what it was! You might be interested to know this too." He said, smiling. Then his smile dissapeared as Hidan eyed him, waiting for him to tell him the news. "I think I'll wait until Itachi gets here though, or you might do something stupid."

"Dammit fish-breath Just fucking tell me." The Jashinist said, almost sounding tired instead of annoyed.

He didn't like this, Hidan was acting wayy too weird and he wasn't going to tell him such important news without the only person who could kind-of-sort-of control him around. There was no way of knowing how the unpredictable man would react.

A series of coughs saved him the trouble, distracting the zealot back to focusing on his first task. He studied to dark haired man in the bed with an unreadable expression until he finished coughing and sucked in a terribly wheezey breath. "Channel chakra into it..." Another few wet, disgusting coughs disrupted his sentence. "And just use it like a microphone... And don't yell."

Kisame squinted down at him, the pathetic, bloody mess of a man who really shouldn't be alive and chatting right now. He was literally getting better by the second, and it was creepy as hell. Great, now there was another zombie running around, as if two weren't enough. And it was also really, *really* bugging him that he couldn't think of his name. Hidan had called him Pineapple head.. which didn't ring any bells. But then again the idiot never really called anyone by their name.. He had nicknames for everyone, and not usually very nice ones either.

"Godammit! Give me that, I'll fucking do it." Hidan snapped, ripping the small piece of jewelry from Kisame's hand and slipping it over his

pinky, seeing as that was the only finger it would fit on.

"Hey! Red-eyes, your fucking puppy followed you here. Come fucking get him before I take him to the pound."

"Hey now!" Kisame said, but Hidan only held up a palm, his eyes unfocused as if having a daydream.

"I don't fucking know. He says he has something important to fucking tell you and he won't leave. He's really pissing me off though so you need to hurry up." Hidan barked out to no one in particular. "Yeah, Pineapple head's apartment... Oh hey bring some like... medical shit too." He paused again, and then let out a loud irritated sigh. "Just fucking do it! Fuck why does everyone always have to question me all the fucking time!?"

Feeling awkward again, Kisame rocked on his toes, letting his vision wonder around the room. There was no way this was Hidan's place. It was way too nice, that psycho always destroyed every dwelling he ever stayed in. Though the blood all over the front room seemed to imply that he *had* been staying here.

His gaze drifted to the person on the bed again, and he made a face as he tried to remember his name. C'mon... he knew this.. It couldn't be that hard. Itachi had helped him beat the shit out of Hidan after he pulled that idiotic stunt with Sasuke. He'd been there at the 'funeral' next to that bearded guy that Kakuzu killed and the really girly-looking Hyuga kid.. He only remember *his* name because he had the byakugan.

He'd gone into their secret warehouse, Deidara hated his guts, Zetsu really wanted to eat him... Hell he'd even tried to get into the Akatsuki, and came very close to succeeding.. He really should be able to remember.

"There." Hidan said, breaking the blue man from his thoughts as he extended the ring. "He's on his way so go fucking wait in the living room for him or something."

Kisame wrinkled his nose. "Ick! I'm not gonna go in there! It looks like you had a blood orgy!" Really, has Hidan *seen* that couch? Fucking nasty.

"Then go sit on the goddamn roof or find a pond to swim around in! I don't fucking care just get the hell out!" Hidan yelled, pointing toward the door.

"Whatever.." The shark-man finally surrendered, sauntering out the door that was slammed shut immediatly behind him. He chuckled to himself as he moved slowly down the hall, listening to Hidan's rantings and trying to ignore the dry blood caked onto everything. He'd noticed a recliner in the corner of the room by the window that had looked clean, but once he found it again it seemed some relitively fresh blood had spattered on it. Once he went to the window and looked out, he assumed it was probably the one Hidan had hopped through, seeing as it had the broken ledge just below the sill.

Bah.. it wasn't as if he'd never gotten a little blood on him before, he just hoped it was the immortal maniac's, God knows what would happen if that shit touched him. He really didn't need to mutate anymore, he'd pretty well succeeded in making himself terrifying enough.

He plopped down into the chair and studied the ring for a second, before slipping it onto his pinkie, or trying.. it only fit over the first knuckle.

Damn Itachi had slender fingers.. He missed them.

"*Kisame?*" Itachi's voice invaded his mind. And the blue man's eyes widened before he looked around in confusion.

" *Why are you at Shikamaru's apartment?*" Came the voice again, and Kisame leaned forward.

"Ahh *Thaaat's* what it was! Damn, I was way off.." He laughed.

"... what?"

"Oh uh.. Sorry Angel.. I don't really know how this thing works.. I just talk out loud huh?"

A sigh in his head, one that made his lips curl up at the corners. It really was good to hear his voice. *"Yes. And please tell me Hidan didn't hear you call me that."*

"Nah, he's all worked up over that Shika-whatsit kid. He's back in the bedroom with him."

"What happened to Shikamaru?"

"No idea. He wouldn't tell me."

"Is that why he asked me to bring medical supplies?"

"Yeah, looks like his lung got punctured, someone pierced him clear through."

Silence for a moment on the other end, and Kisame adjusted the ring to make sure he hadn't broken connection.

"Hn. Well I'll be there momentarily. What was it you needed to tell me?"

"Hmm.. You know it slipped my mind again.." He said grinning, this ring-chat thing was pretty cool, actually. Why the hell didn't Itachi make one of these for him? Then he wouldn't have to wander all over the fucking continent after not hearing a damn word from him for over a month.

"... Kisa..."

"It's right on the tip of my tongue.. I can't seem to recall..."

Another bodiless sigh, followed by a heartbeat of silence. *"Babe... tell me."* Itachi's voice said seductively, and Kisame almost burst into

laughter. Holy shit it felt like phone sex foreplay!

"Okay, yeahh, I remember now. Uh, Kakuzu isn't dead."

"... What?"

"Yeah, I saw him. He came back, and he was mad." He paused, shuddering. "Really, *really* mad. He wanted to know where Hidan was and Leader almost had to get rough with him just to get him to leave before he destroyed something."

"... Kisame. How long ago was this?"

"Uh.. A few days. Took me forever to track you to this city, why didn't you call me?"

"I'll be there soon, Help Hidan with Shikamaru. He should be healing pretty fast but he needs to be able to walk on his own at the very least."

"You don't think he's coming after him do you?"

"Honey, please. Go help them."

That sentence ended with such finality that it was almost as if he'd heard the receiver click off in his head. He blinked back to reality, and ran a hand through his hair. Oh damn.. He didn't want to get involved in any of the weird shit that went on between the two zombies. He'd just wanted to see Itachi...

Maaaybe he should tell Hidan.. But then again, Itachi hadn't said anything about it. So maybe it would be a bad idea..

Hmm, he'd just go along with it, seeing as he literally had no fucking idea what the hell was going on. This little vacation was beginning to get really...

... really troublesome...

A/N-

:D

Three cheers for Kisame! Lol, since he's like.. my fourth fav Akatsuki and he literally only had like 5 minutes of screentime in the prequel, I figured he deserved his own little time in the spotlight.

And the random fluffiness between them was of course for my wonderful bestie, Fluffy. I'm sure you all know who she is by now. xD

SO! Yeah, did I blow your minds? Do you hate me?

Cuz I kinda hate me, but I couldn't resist. Like literally... it had to happen for the plot to work out. So.. put down your pitchforks and blow out your torches. Because obviously, Shikamaru isn't dead. He's got the great and almighty Jashin on his side, bitches!

Also, random note; The theme song for this whole story has been decided. It's called 'Born to die' By Lana del Ray. Listen to a lyrics version, if you can. Cause it is just so... soo perfect for Shikamaru and Hidan's mindset.

So, once again I'm so fucking tired that my brain will hardly function. This chapter was sooooo difficult because of that, and I sincerely hope that everything makes sense and that I portrayed everything (and everyone) clearly. I'm sure there's a whole army of typos, so forgive them, please, please, please.

Oh, and also, Freshmade soul cookies go out to Shewolfbyakugan, Gelberblitz, and Fluffyisemo for reviewing last chapter. Eat them, save them, put a dress and tiara on them and have a tea party, I don't care, they're yours now.

PEOPLE! I know that those three are not the only ones reading this, Last chapter alone has been viewed by 35 different logged-in accounts, so don't think I don't know that you all are reading and not reviewing. Seriously, I'm gonna get pissed.

Review. I need it.

NEED!

III tidings

Recurring Nightmares

So much darkness. Real darkness, theoretical darkness, it was everywhere.

He felt disgusting, but not in a way that could be fixed with a shower. He was so angry, so frustrated, so confused. This couldn't be all that there was, all that was left... He didn't even know how to feel about it, he couldn't even categorize it in his own mind.

Shikamaru knew he was asleep, as he sit in the single orb of illumination amidst an inky blackness. Not the same as before, it wasn't empty. No, it was so heavy and full that he almost felt like he were submerged in a jar of honey, except it wasn't sweet.

At least he could breathe, and he focused on his breathing as a way to keep his mind from doing that stupid thinking thing it always did. He didn't want to think, it was too hard. He didn't have the energy. He could even admit that he was happy to be alone in this murky nothingness that surrounded him. He did not want to be lonley, but that's not what this was. To him it was just a small break from the chaos his life had become.

He hadn't had a nightmare in so long, it felt like. Even though it was only a matter of days. There had been so much emotional and now even physical trauma cram-packed into it that he felt he no longer had any rational sense of time.

He took a deep breath and closed his eyes.

Why Jashin? Just tell me why, and I'll never question you again.

He did not expect to hear an answer, and the silence did not surprise him. He merely stared into the thick dark.

At least he wasn't hurting. He wasn't happy but he wasn't in pain. He knew his real body was currently recovering from that nasty little cut he'd gotten. He wasn't even upset about it... He'd once again kept Neji alive through another of his two past and present lovers encounters. And he had protected Hidan as well, though at a bit of a cost.

It was cutting it close, he would admit. If those two met again, he may very well not survive... and honestly the thought did nothing to him. It was merely a fact, that he would die to protect either of them. He wasn't surprised in the least that this had no emotional effect of him. At this point it was just something he'd come to realize.

"You're so noble, my child. A rare quality to retain under the stress you've been put through."

Shikamaru lifted his head wearily to the familiar voice, one so deep that he could nearly feel it in his bones.

He did not expect to see someone, however. Standing in front of him, towering over his slouched and seated form. He'd only expected the bodiless voice that usually spoke to him in these situations.

His mouth dropped further and further open as his eyes trailed up, up, up until they finally met with this strangers. Brilliant yellow orbs with a rectangular pupil, somehow adding malevolence to what would other wise be the most beautiful man he'd ever seen.

Wild, sheer black hair that flowed like water around his face, down his broad shoulders and defined pectorals only to fade away into the thick darkness that seemed to pool even heavier around him.

Perfectly unmarred porcelaine skin that bordered on angelic shaped a rugged but still somehow gently feminine face. Lips that looked like they were made for no other purpose than to kiss you into an abysmal state of euphoria curled upward at the ends.

"I'm pleased, I'll say. And maybe even interested in how you remain so neutral, given all that has occurred in your recent life. I have filled you with hate and I have given you pleasure in all the places that have broken many others. And you still do not succumb. It's... intriguing."

Shikamaru stared, speechless. He knew without a single doubt who this person was, yet at the same time the belief would not claim his mind.

Again he was struck with the thought that Jashin is *real* . Even though he had believed, he still had not *believed*.

And he would never have expected him to look as such. Not for the fact that he thought he would appear as something else, but for the assumption that as the omnipotent being he was, he would have no form at all.

Jashin lifted a hand to his chin, delicate and deadly with some sort of weapon built onto his fingers that had them ending in fearsomely sharp metal talons.

On his right shoulder was a large metal plate, carved with the indescribable design that was much like the dagger Hidan had showed him, and topped with three huge horns, each longer than the last.

Further combinations of tight black leather and intricately decorated metal wrapped itself around his arms and lower body, leaving the delectably perfect chest and abdominals bare, outlined with hipbones that protruded just enough to be drop-dead sexy without making him seem emaciated.

Holy shit... No wonder Hidan never shut up about this man.

Random assortments of buckles and straps filled the leather with all kinds of spikes and other sharp weaponry sporadically hanging from him in a display that would be overkill on anyone else, but on this

perfect being only added to the level of arousing danger he emanated.

"You ask why, always wanting to know why. And yet you're never specific, my son. You cannot ask questions like such and expect satisfying answers. You're so innocently tainted, it's curious."

Shikamaru tried to force words from his gaping mouth, unsure if he was being rude in his relentless staring but unable to do anything else. Jashin did not give him any clues with the way he was regarding him either.

"You... you're.."

Jashin smiled, wickedly devious and tantalizingly sweet at the same time. "Yes. I am, Shikamaru Nara. Are you so surprised?" He paused, as if waiting for an answer but knowing he wouldn't receive one from the awestruck man below him. "You're so stubborn, really. It's admirable and insufferable at the same time. So here I am." The gorgeous being let out a lighthearted chuckle that made Shikamaru's skin crawl. "And even now you doubt me."

The spikey haired man blinked, trying to urge his brain into producing rational thoughts instead of just screaming at him over and over that there is no way this is really happening.

"This... this is a dream.." He finally breathed, and Jashin continued regarding him with unreadable expressions.

"It is whatever you make of it, my child. As are all my gifts. However your free samples have come to an end. Repairing mortal bodies is not such an easy thing to do, and because neither you nor dearest Hidan have given me anything other than your own blood, my means of assisting you are running thin."

Shikamaru rose to his feet only due to the small amount of panic at the recognition of what the demon before him was suggesting.

"I am hungry, child. And though the two of you have been ever so entertaining, I cannot survive of blood alone. Consider it the same as trying to survive on candy. So, if you'd like to make negotiations, now would be the time. My patience is running thin in circumstance to this Hyuga business."

Shikamaru's stomach did a somersault. Holy shit, the great and powerful Jashin was trying to make a deal with him instead of just forcing him to do what he wanted. This was... good? Bad? He wasn't sure... The slaughter god must obviously be aware that he is not going to simply let Neji die. So he's offering to change the terms of the Hyuga family's curse...

This.. this was too perfect! It was exactly what he needed!

"Does Hidan... erm... feel the same way about me? As I do for him... I mean.."

Jashin leaned forward ever so slightly, putting his hands behind his back, traces of amusement evident in his ghost of a smile. "I don't think you need to waste time asking aa question with such a clearly evident answer, my son."

Shikamaru blinked, suddenly feeling like an utter moron as he recalled all the glaringly obvious signs that he hadn't even noticed before. He had taken care of him during the infection, showed him how Jashinism worked, healed his aching insides. Just a few hours ago he had given up the pursuit of Neji, whos soul Jashin was still after, in order to get him out of that disgusting sacrificial chamber and bring him to his own apartment. After that stupid interruption by the shark-man he remembered as being Itachi's associate, the zealot had remained almost constantly beside him, cleaning his wounds, changing his bandages, slipping pain pills and antibiotics into the water bottle he helped Shikamaru drink from... Hidan wasn't the kind of person to do such a thing. He knew it without even knowing, though it wasn't a hard conclusion to come to. If he didn't care about you then he literally didn't care.

Even before everything had happened, back at the old house in the small town, Hidan had tried so hard to gain his friendship. He'd shown interest in him even then. Shikamaru had attributed it to some plot to steal Neji's soul, which it may have halfway been. But why go to all the trouble of befriending the Nara? Why not just kidnap Neji in their sleep and be done with it...

"I find it amusing that you still don't know him at all." Jashin said, tearing Shikamaru from his heart-wrenching day dreams. "You should understand him more than anyone."

Taking a deep breath, He steeled himself. He had to do so to make the deal he was about to make with the God of chaos, destruction, and death. It wasn't an easy one to make, and once again he was not only shouldering an unnecessary burden, but he was doing so just to save not only Neji's soul, but Hidan's as well. It was the only way to settle the debts and satisfy Jashin.

"Come, Shikamaru... Let's have a chat..." Jashin said, giving him a smile that could melt a glacier and freeze the sun.

His eyes opened slowly to stare up at the familiar apartment ceiling. He could sense right away that he was alone in his bedroom.

The clock on the wall said it was just after 6 p.m. But gave no clue as to what day it was. Not that he even cared, at the moment. He could hear muffled conversation going on in the other room, broken by an occasional loud vulgarity shouted by Hidan. It was comforting to know he was no longer in a panic, concern on the annoying man was definitely adorable, but he wanted everything back to normal, even his irritating albino lover.

He felt... strange, now that he was awake. The Jashin dream had seemed to last forever, in fact it had been getting to the point where he thought maybe he hadn't even survived.

"I want to take the Hyuga curse onto myself." His own voice echoed in his head. He.. he didn't feel any different, though he didn't know why he would. It's not as if it would have any sort of tangible effect on him.

He couldn't even be sure it was there, aside from just trusting the demon God to hold to his words. But at least this way Neji would be taken out of the equation. He hoped so at least.

"It's a delightful concept, my child. I love your devious little brain. And the fact that it will only work because of your unique situation intruiges me further. It's close to an offer I couldn't refuse, the chance may never come again..."

It was downright eerie to have sat there and made what was basically a deal to sell his soul with the revered Jashin. And he had to constantly chase away the doubt that flooded his mind whenever he wondered whether it would work out or not. This plan, unlike many of his others had all the room for error in the world.

He tried to sit up and groaned loudly when pain shot through his chest as if he'd been stabbed all over again.

Immediatly it went silent in the livingroom and Shikamaru tried to control his suddenly labored breathing, just waiting for someone to come bursting in the door. What he didn't expect is that it was Itachi who finally peeked in. He vaguely remembered Hidan telling him to come.

The corners of the Uchihas mouth crooked up as he stepped fully into the room. "Good afternoon, Shikamaru." He closed the door behind him, which didn't strike the Nara as odd until the Sharingan users stepped to the window and peeked through the blinds.

"How long was I out?" He croaked, clearing his throat immediatly after and nearly gagging at all the phlegm and who fucking knows what else that came loose.

Itachi absently handed him a styrofoam cup just in time for Shika to hawk it in and apologize for the display. The raven-haired man waved it off.

"About 37 hours. A day and a half. Are you feeling better?"

"Considering I was on the verge of death... yes." Shikamaru said, pushing away Jashin's words as they threatened to float back into his mind. He didn't want to think about it anymore. The deal was made and it was over with. All there was to focus on now was recovery.

"Are you well enough to get up?"

Shikamaru gave the man a sideways look. "Uh.. I don't know I haven't tried." Even though he did..

Itachi sighed and ran a hand through his bangs, an action that would not mean much coming from anyone else. It was very un-Itachi-like, however, and Shika's brows creased in concern.

"Why, what's going on?" His heart immediately began racing, sending waves of pain rippling through him with each beat. Dear Jashin, If Itachi freaking Uchiha the living robot was worried then it wasn't something to take lightly.

He was regarded with dark, hesitant eyes for a long moment. "I have some.. very troublesome news. You remember Kisame?"

Shikamaru nodded, who could forget a half-shark hulking giant of a man with blue skin and even bluer hair? He'd apparently spotted Hidan and followed him back to the apartment after the whole calamity that occurred at what Shikamaru could only assume had once been the loyal Jashinists residence. At least.. that's what he'd gathered from their conversation they'd had idly while Shikamaru thought he was dying.

Such wonderful friends he had...

"Well, he was seeking me out to inform me that... it seems Kakuzu has finally made a reappearance." He shifted uncomfortably as he talked, and Shikamaru wondered briefly why he seemed so much less refined than usual.

At least until Itachi's words sunk in and bitch-slapped that thought right out of his head. Kakuzu was alive? After being MIA for nearly a year plus another month. First of all, nice one Karma, your blessings continue to rain down. And second of all, WHAT THE FUCK?!

He finally fixes the problem with his ex that seemed to be a nightmare, and now there was /Hidan's/ baggage to deal with?! And Kakuzu... that man was on an entirely other level than Neji. He was on a whole new planet.

"Kakuzu. As in Hidan's Kakuzu. He's alive?"

Itachi nodded somberly. "He showed up a few days ago, Kisame was there when he did. And he appears to be upset... very upset. I would assume he's looking for Hidan as we speak."

Oh shit.. Oh fuck... Oh shitfuck. Kakuzu was mad. Judging by the elder Uchiha's sudden personality change, Kakuzu wasn't just upset, he was probably angry as hell.

Oh no.. if he showed up here.. And found out what happened... OH JASHIN he didn't even want to think about it. Just the imagery alone would bring on a panic attack.

"... Does Hidan know?"

"No. I was unsure of how he might react, I thought it best to... let you tell him. Perhaps you'd be able to keep him calm."

"You think he's going to be mad too?"

A crease of doubt made itself present on Itachi's forehead. "Not necessarily. I'm thinking he's either going to be in shock, or possibly

run for his life."

Shikamaru scoffed at this. Good, they could both hop a boat and sail to a new country. Start spreading the word of Jashin overseas.

"You remember when I told you Hidan went on a rampage?" The Uchiha continued, pausing until Shika nodded. "Well I wasn't exaggerating. He destroyed everything. The house and everything inside it was demolished and burned to a crisp, even the hidden chamber had collapsed."

Oh Jashin... You're probably laughing your ass off wherever you are.

"Oh shit..." He breathed, staring wide eyed at the ceiling.

"My sentiments exactly... Kakuzu values very little in this world more than his hard-earned money and investments. If he gets a grip on Hidan then he's not going to stop beating him for days. And I can't even fathom how he might act when he finds out about you two. He may be rational or he might try to kill you."

The matter-of-fact way that Itachi stated this was only making it harder for Shikamaru to process the thought. This was terrible. Kakuzu was quite literally among the top five biggest reasons he had feared Hidan in the first place. To be with such a man, and survive the things Kakuzu did to him would be a nightmare in itself. He'd forgotten until now how positively obsessed with pain the zealot must be to be happy in a relationship like that.

Holy hell, he was really glad Hidan hadn't asked him to do anything like that.

"... We need to get the fuck out of here." He grunted, forcing himself into a sitting position. Oh damn that hurt. Shit, when would he be able to convert pain into pleasure? Cause this was getting old...

"Not unless you are well enough. If we go out in the open there's a greater chance of him locating us."

"So!? If we stay here and he finds us then theres nowhere to run."

Itachi was silent at this. There was probably nowhere to hide and running would likely only aggravate the older man. But there was no other choice. He didn't have the slightest idea what Kakuzu was capable of, but it didn't matter. Itachi could restrain Hidan with ease, something Shikamaru had trouble with even though he knew he was stronger than him. And If the Uchiha was worried, Shika should probably be terrified.

"How much time do you think we have?" He asked in between grunts as he pulled off the blanket and swung his legs to the side of the bed. Adrenaline spiked by his fear helped to overcome the pain, but even so he needed more time to heal. Surely at the rate he was going he would be at least somewhat useful in a few more hours.

"There's no way of knowing. Honestly I'm surprised he hasn't reached us yet. Kakuzu is the most skilled tracker I know, and Kisame beating him here is a miracle in itself."

Damn... this was not good. It was so not good. He may not even have time to explain to Hidan. They needed to go, like now. And unfortunately that meant taking his car.

"Can you drive stick?"

Itachi looked almost insulted as he rounded the bed and held out a hand to Help Shikamaru to his feet. "Of course. Do I look like some teenager fresh out of drivers ed?"

Shikamaru shrugged, receiving a glare for it. How was he supposed to know? The only Akatsuki members he'd ever seen drive an actual car were that Sasori fellow and Kakuzu. "Well. There's no way I'm letting Hidan drive my car and I can't really go running around like this. So you'll have to."

"Kisame can drive." Itachi stated quickly. "I'd rather be able to pay attention to what's going on. He's quick to respond to orders and

used to making decisions under stress."

Okay.. it really didn't make a difference who drove, as long as they were on the road in the next five minutes. Where the hell they would go had yet to be decided. At this point stalling for time was main priority. Kisame and Itachi were here to help, Hidan may end up being useless or even make matters worse, And Shikamaru would only get in the way until he could move without feeling like he couldn't breathe and whimpering in pain. Dammit, of all the times to be pierced with a goddamn sword...

How was he going to tell Hidan that Kakuzu was not only alive but on his way? He could just blurt it out.. But the smallest fraction of him was afraid of how he might react. Not that he may be scared or angry or even speechless, but that he might be happy. Well, of course he would be happy but... where would this leave them?

As if sensing that Shikamaru was thinking of him, the preist came barging in.

"What the fuck are you two so chatty about in here?" He stopped for a moment, violet eyes flicking back and forth between the hesitant glances they each regarded him with. "Why the hell are you lookin' at me like that?"

"Hidan, we have to go, I'll explain everything to you in the car but right now I need your help." Shikamaru said, wobbling on his feet and wincing as the stab of pain from standing upright. Hidan grimaced.

"What the hell!? That's all I've been fuckin' doing for like two goddamn days! Do I at least get a fucking thank you?"

Shikamaru smiled, giving Itachi a look before the elder Uchiha brother silently slipped from the room. He took a step forward, stumbling halfway on purpose. Hidan of course closed the distance between them to stabilize him and before he could pull away

Shikamaru buried his hands in the silver hair he'd grown so fond of and crashed their mouths together.

It wasn't anything like the other few kisses they'd shared, but at the same time still held all the same emotion, if not more.

Hidan didn't struggle aside from a fleeting surprised expression, and roughly pulled the spikey haired Jashinist tightly against him, rewarded with a growl caused by pain and slight anger at the albino for causing it. He only deepened the kiss, running a tongue across Shikamaru's lips and letting it dive inside when granted entrance.

The Nara closed his eyes, reveling in the ecstasy Hidan caused in his body, trying to ignore the persisting depression that tugged at the back of his mind. Thrusting his own tongue out, battling with the other for some unknown prize, he hoped and prayed to Jashin with everything he had that this would not be the last kiss he shared with the unholy, angelic, beautiful, terror of a man.

Finally he let his hands slide down the zealot's neck, wrapping his arms around as he broke away, letting his forehead rest on a slightly heaving chest.

"Thank you..." He muttered, eyes still closed. "For everything Hidan. I mean it."

He wanted to say more, dear Jashin how he wanted to say those three little words in this perfect moment they had, frozen in time.

But... they weren't frozen. This would pass just as everything else did, fading into a memory no matter how he tried to keep it alive. And his brain wouldn't let him, it was too soon, there was too much of a risk for rejection... and those reasons dulled in comparison to the all-consuming pain he felt in his heart. A foreboding ache that something bad was going to happen when Kakuzu showed up, because really it was only a matter of time. He didn't want to believe it, he was just being paranoid, he reassured himself. But he couldn't

help the feeling that maybe Jashin was trying to warn him, and also remind him of their deal.

He smiled slightly at this, Hidan would still be his, even if he wasn't...

"Why you gotta make everything awkward.." Hidan replied, lowering his chin to rest ever-so-lightly on the top of Shikamaru's head arms still settled in the small of his back.

"Just to bug you..." He chuckled in return. Then with a deep breath he free'd himself from the embrace. "Alright, toss me that shirt and that vest." He said, pulling off his old bandages to check on his wound. Hidan complied wordlessly, but Sgika paid no mind. He couldn't quite see it too well without a mirror, but it looked much better, there was already scar tissue forming around the edges. Damn, at this rate the hole had to at least be already closed up. He knew his lung had to have mostly repaired itself seeing as he could breathe just fine.

His vision was blocked briefly as the shirt he requested was tossed onto his head. He snatched it off to glare playfully at Hidan when he was blinded again by the second article of clothing.

"Where are we going that's so fucking important all the sudden anyway?"

Shikamaru hesitated, unable to meet his lovers eyes as he contemplated how he was going to tell him. "I'll tell you once we're in the car."

This of course had Hidan eyeing him in suspicion and barely contained anger. "I'm not agreeing to anything until you and red-eyes quit acting so fucking shadey."

"Hidan please..."

"No. What the hell aren't you telling me. What the hell was that mushy shit about? What the fuck is going on that you can't tell me

right fucking now? Even fish-brain out there is jumpy."

Shikamaru was still reluctant, chewing nervously on the inside of his cheek.

Hidan just growled and threw his hands up. "I'm just about fucking fed up with being treated like a goddamn kid. I'm older than both of you! Maybe I could fucking tolerate it from Kakuzu because he was a grouchy old fuck, but don't you do this shit to me Pineapple head, seriously. Or I'm gonna get pissed off."

Shikamaru closed his eyes and sucked in a calm breath. Fine.. he could do this. He was aware of Itachi and most likely Kisame standing just outside the door, ready to intervene if needed.

"Okay.. But you have to do what I ask okay? I just can't... I need you to help me at least until this stupid hole through my chest is gone."

The mentioning of this out loud subconsciously drug his gaze across Hidan's, as usual, shirtless body. He had received three times the amount of injuries Shikamaru had and his body was flawless. Not even a single scar marred his skin. Damn.. maybe the healing process slowly worked faster and faster as the years passed by.

Hidan didn't respond aside from an unbroken, impatient stare. Shikamaru gathered himself, "Kakuzu is alive." He said in monotone, forcing everything from his mind as he watched Hidan's reaction.

The zealot just eyed him sideways. "That's not fucking funny."

"I.. it's not a joke, Hidan. That's why Kisame is here, he came to warn Itachi."

"Why the hell would he need to warn him about something stupid like that?"

"Because he's pissed to all hell. He's probably on his way here."

Then the silver haired Jashinist surprised the fuck out of him by bursting into laughter. Then he punched Shika a little too hard to be playful on the shoulder. "Right. Okay Pineapple head, whatever you say. Kakuzu is gone for a fucking whole year, twelve long fucking months, and all the sudden he's alive and coming to visit. I think I gave you too many pills."

The Nara just stared in disbelief. Did he seriously not believe him or was this some sort of 5-stage thing? Was he in denial? Did Hidan's mind even *work* like a normal persons?

"Hidan... He's not coming for a visit he's coming to rip you to pieces. And then when he finds out about us he's going to... well you probably fucking know better than I do."

Hidan opened his mouth to argue, judging by his expression, but just then a soft knock interrupted them and Itachi soft but strong voice drifted in.

"The clock is ticking.."

Hidan stared at the door, solemn now but still not seeming to understand the gravity of the situation.

"In case you didn't understand that means hurry the hell up! I wanna get out of this gross room ASAP!" Kisame barked. At this Hidan's eyes narrowed and he yanked the door open. "Well let's fucking go then." He said through clenched teeth, and stormed out of the room without waiting for Shikamaru to follow.

Itachi met his eyes and shrugged, then making the 'You first' gesture and waiting patiently as Shikamaru shuffled past him.

Even in those few minutes he was feeling stronger. *Thank you Jashin*. He was pretty sure he was getting an extra boost today... Even his leg had taken longer than this to get to a managable level of pain. Or maybe the adrenaline and his terror were just numbing him. Either way it was a good thing.

"Yeah, let's get out of here." Shikamaru said, glancing at Kisame. "I guess you're driving."

The shark-man crinkled his nose. "Driving? Who decided on that?"

"I did." Itachi said in Shika's place. "Shikamaru's not improved enough to outrun him. I'm going to keep watch. Have you decided where we're going to go?" The last was directed at the Spikey haired man, now at the front door following Hidan.

"It doesn't matter. We just have to stall for time. The more we stay mobile the longer it will take to find us." He replied quickly, Snatching his keys and tossing them behind him without looking.

"Very well. We'll meet you down there." The sharingan user stated at the clink of what Shikamaru assumed was Kisame catching the tossed item. When he turned to shut the door both men had already vanished.

He turned to look at a still solemn Hidan, and nodded before shutting it behind him.

Perched on the roof like a gargoyle, a dark hulking form watched below it through the hollow eyes of a mask.

A fast clattering rumbled from it's threaded body as it spotted two familiar forms spring from the window and silently make their way to the ground below.

That was the blue man it was told to follow, and had been waiting patiently for it's master to arrive at the destination it shadowed him to.

They were on the move again, which meant it was too.

It silently slid over the concrete edge and slithered down the building in a reptilian series of movements, following the blue man around the

side of the building and quickly pressing itself into the shadows as two more figures appeared around the same corner.

The blue man fiddled with a machine sitting idle on the street and opened the door to place himself inside, and the other three followed suit not long after.

A presence invaded its mind as it watched, the echo of a dark chuckle sparking excitement in the beast and making its stringy skin quiver.

"Delay them." A deep voice commanded, and it complied, leaping from the building and twisting into a barrel roll as it plummeted to the ground below. Spiderweb-like appendages unfolded from its back as it fell, directing its midair movements until it smashed onto the ground in front of the machine.

The shocked and alerted outburst from the men in the car made it quiver again as it opened the mouth of the mask serving as its face with a crack and roared.

A sudden squealing made its vision quaver and suddenly it was rammed by the machine and sent rolling to the side.

It recovered quickly, and within a split second it spread its wings and pushed off, rocketing into the air in pursuit.

xx

"WHAT THE FUCKING SHIT WAS THAT!?" Shikamaru shrilled as they skidded around the corner, blowing through the sawhorse barrier set up by construction workers and swerved through the destroyed part of the street.

He clutched at the seat in front of him and looked beside him to an even paler than usual Hidan.

"It seems we had less time than we thought." Itachi said calmly from the front passenger seat, turning to look back with Sharingan blazing. "That was one of Kakuzu's... helpers."

Shikamaru gaped at him. "What!? What the hell is that thing!?"

"One of his hearts. He has a total of five, normally."

"HE HAS FIVE FUCKING HEARTS!" The Nara shouted, turning from Itachi to the man beside him, who was unrealistically still in the jousting car.

"It's creepy huh?" Kisame laughed, making Shikamaru want to slap him for his nonchalance. "Not dying is pretty freaky, but at least crap-for-brains here is normal aside from that."

"Kisame please focus on the road." Itachi ordered calmly.

"You got it babe."

Again Shikamaru gawked. "Damn, so you *are* together!"

"This is neither the time nor place to discuss my romantic life Shikamaru." The Uchiha snapped, eyebrow twitching.

"Is *everyone* in the Akatsuki gay!? Is it like a club for men who like men!? Is that why I almost got in!?" He continued, wanting to slap himself now for being so curious of such a thing under the circumstances.

"No. Please drop it." Itachi said, shifting to look through the sunroof at the beast pursuing them as Kisame chuckled behind the wheel.

"I'm pretty sure Pinnochio and blondie just haven't come out of the closet yet."

"SHUT UP!" Itachi snapped. "We have more important things to discuss right now! Shikamaru, if that beast has spotted us then we have very little time before Kakuzu is going to show up. Not enough

time for you to fully recover. I suggest we try to get outside city limits-
"

He was interrupted as the road ahead of the car suddenly exploded, Kisame maneuvered the vehicle around it just in time, though the windsheild cracked as a large chunk cement crashed into it and rolled off.

Damn, his insurance adjuster was *not* going to be happy after this.

"Yeah, sounds like a good idea." Shikamaru gasped, clutching as his chest with one hand and clinging to the back of the seat with the other.

"I don't think he's going to be in the mood to calmly discuss the situation if he's got that thing attacking us."

"I believe it's trying to stall us. It would not have missed if it intended harm." Itachi said over the roar of air as he rolled his window down.

The Shikamaru caught the blur of a bullet made of what looked like compacted air just before the road to the side of them erupted, shoeering the Uchiha in debree before it was left quickly behind them.

"Go faster!" Shikamaru ordered. "The cops know my plate, they won't interfere."

"I don't think they would anyway with that fucker on our asses." Hidan finally spoke up, causing two sets of eyes to land on him. "Then again they are pretty fucking stupid."

His eyes met Shikamaru's. They were swirling in a hurricane of emotions. It made his heart ache with concern not only for Hidan but for himself.

Please Jashin don't let him leave me.

He felt that little twinge, that reminder of their deal, and pushed the thought from his head. He wouldn't... not after all that had happened..

"Dammit!" Kisame swore, slamming everyone to the left side of the car as he narrowly evaded another explosion. Other drivers honked and swerved and skidded to a stop, and to Shikamaru's irritation and amusement he took the half-second to flip them off before flooring the gas pedal.

Apparently the Shark-man had a bit of road rage.

"Why the hell did I get involved in this!" He growled, "Anything that involves you two zombies is always a load of out-of-hand bull!"

"HEY SHARK-DICK! This isn't my fucking fault!"

"You didn't have to level your house! Just bitch and cry like a normal person!"

"You would be pissed too if you found out Red-eyes was dead!"

"ENOUGH!" Itachi snarled, leaving the whole car in dead silence.

"How many fucking times am I going to have to point out that we are under *attack* . Save your childish bickering for another time"

There was silence for a moment, or what would be silence if the ground around them weren't erupting. Luckily they were on a multi-lane highway now. Though dodging the other cars seemed more of a hassle than necessary, it was something that can't be helped.

Shikamaru sighed, he would surely lose his job for this, hopefully no innocent bystanders were injured or killed.

The speedometer was resting steadily on 100 MPH as they blew past the other drivers. Shikamaru tried to force away the memory of running over the rooftops in his unknowing search for Hidan. Now

that he knew how fast that was, he seriously doubted he'd been going quite that speed.

"Hey where's your brother while all this is going on?" Kisame suddenly asked, making Itachi sigh in annoyance. "I asked him to tail Neji Hyuga and make sure he wasn't planning to cause any more trouble."

Shikamaru blinked, "I really hope he doesn't let Neji see him."

"Sasuke is aware of Neji's negative feelings toward him. If he's brash enough to take any action against him I will take care of it."

Time suddenly seemed to slow to a snails pace as the road beneath them erupted and the car was suddenly airborne. Kisame's face twisted, his pointed teeth clenched as he tried to regain control, Shikamaru wrapped both arms around the headrest in front of him when his butt left the seat, And Hidan braced himself but still remained uncharacteristically stoic.

A distant shout startled him before he realized he was the one who made it after realizing Itachi was no longer in the car. And when the wheels finally slammed into the ground, smashing the three back into their seats and letting time resume at a normal pace, he looked up only to see the lower portion of Itachi's legs attached to the cars roof with a faint chakra glow.

"IS HE FUCKING INSANE!?" Shikamaru cried, and Kisame just smirked.

"I think it's sexy."

"KATON!"

An orange glow enveloped the car briefly before the Nara twisted to see Kakuzu's monster barely evade a giant fireball. It's mouth cracked open and let out a barrage of air bullets, shattering the back window and tearing holes in the roof. Shikamaru managed to duck

and avoid them, but re-emerged almost instantly as Hidan swore. One had caught him on the shoulder, and the blood was instantly gushing.

"GODDAMIT RED-EYES YOU FUCKIN' RETARD! DON'T PROVOKE IT!" He shouted, growling then at Shikamaru when he slapped his hands over the wound to apply pressure out of instinct.

His face smoothed out then, surprising the spikey haired Jashinist with a chuckle.

"You weren't fucking around with me after all huh?" He had a slight grin on, but it was easy to see through. The zealot was warring within himself, trying to come to some sort of conclusion but unable to. Shikamaru knew he loved Kakuzu, he had to. The things those two did to each other had to have love behind it to keep them together through the terrifying amount of violence.

He also knew Hidan felt strongly for him. And it nearly broke his heart to have to watch him try to make such a decision, unable to do anything but put as little pressure as possible on him.

He could empathize, but not entirely. Neji had not mysteriously disappeared. He had left the relationship willingly. There were no loose ends, the relationship was over.

But Kakuzu did not know Hidan had moved on. He might not have even realized how much time had passed depending on the details of his absence. The other members of Akatsuki most likely informed him of the general acceptance of his death... But... well, it was just a mess. All of this was one huge fucking hell of a drag.

"I wouldn't joke about something like that..." He replied softly.

Hidan sighed, long and slow. His eyes were planted firmly in the seat in front of him as the car swerved and bumped and screeched.

Suddenly the moment was ruined when glass suddenly rained down on them as Itachi shoved his foot through the sunroof.

He shoved himself back into his original spot just before the Uchihas lithe form dove into the seat between him, followed not half a millisecond later by a loud thunk that shook the car.

"SHIT!" Kisame shouted as the car fish-tailed.

A hand that looked like it was made of millions and millions of tiny threads reached down through the sunroof and grasped the headrest of the drivers seat, ripping it off with one jerk.

Shikamaru's breath hissed in at the pain of all this movement, and he yelped again as the Shark-man finally lost control and Itachi grabbed the Nara by the shoulders and shoved him down to avoid the monster latching onto him.

It shrieked when its lower body came loose of the roof and slammed into the side of the car, showering Hidan again with glass after the window exploded.

Tires screeched and Kisame was desperately trying to get the vehicle out of it's parallel position to the road. They smashed through the metal barriers, the monster leaped off, and once the tires hit grass they were thrown into a roll.

Dirt and grass and what Shikamaru assumed was wheat or some other manner of crop flew in through every window. Bodies crashed against each other and the inside of the car, thrown around like a human version of pinball. Shikamaru saw stars and heard nothing but the sounds of destruction, clinging to consciousness as his chest violently erupted in pain and the rest of his body smashed into flesh and bone and metal alike. More blood spurted from his mouth when an elbow collided against his jaw and a knee rammed into his still-healing back simultaneously.

He was pretty sure he just kicked Itachi in the face before the back of the raven haired man's head somehow slammed against his own. And then when he thought he could not possibly experience more pain... it stopped.

The world finally held still and the dust settled as he stared gasping at the seat he had previously been sitting on, now over his head.

Shit, his insurance adjuster was going to be *really* unhappy.

Someone groaned in the sudden overwhelming silence, Kisame, Shikamaru recognized. Hidan followed shortly with a breathy string of swears.

Itachi's body shifted, letting shards of glass and metallic flakes slide from his dark clothing, And Shikamaru tried to move the leg draped across him only to suck in a breath at the pain and then launch himself into a coughing/blood vomiting fit.

"Everyone alive?" Kisame croaked, his gravity defying blue hair peeking between the concave roof and the mangled seats.

"Red-eyes. I'm never getting in a fucking car with you two again.."
Hidan said, grunting with effort as he pulled his foot free from the side of the car and the smashed frame of the back window.

"Hey I'd like to see you do better you albino idiot."

"FUCK YOU SHARK-COCK!"

"Both of you shut up.. I have a headache." Itachi muttered. "Hidan get the hell out so I can escape this death trap."

"Keep your panties on I'm fuckin' workin on it." He growled, ripping his blood-drenched hand free. Then he rolled to the side and army-crawled out the back window. Itachi mimic'd him, and then leaned back over. "Do you need help?"

Shikamaru winced as he positioned his body to crawl out, trying to focus on his breathing instead of the stabbing pain. He probably looked absolutely pitiful, and Itachi's concerned look only re-enforced the assumption. He pulled himself forward, gritting his teeth but managing on his own.

"I think I'm okay.." He said, trying in vain to wipe the blood from his chin. Dear Jashin could his life get any more chaotic? *Don't fucking tempt fate you idiot.* Before he pulled himself any further, he reached up underneath the passenger front seat above him, and managed a small smile when his fingers touched cold metal. Without being able to look, he unsnapped the buttons and pulled the weapon from it's secured position, sliding it into a pocket on his vest. He wiggled his upper torso free of the car just as Hidan's feet came into view. "I don't see Kuzu's mask, Pineapple head. I think we might have killed it.."

Kuzu?

"If we killed it then we would find it's body. It's hiding until Kakuzu get's here." Itachi said from behind him, most likely tending to Kisame.

"I'm gonna beat the shit out of him for putting us through that, seriously."

"Hn. I'd like to see that."

"Fuck off Red-eyes, just cause you're scared of him doesn't mean I am..."

Shikamaru saw the black threads before anyone else did, creeping up from the very ground itself. He wouldn't have time to warn Hidan, and even if he did then the priest wouldn't have time to evade. Quickly he put his first two fingers to his lips and mutter his invocation word, and the shadows around him from the car bolted out and wrapped around the threads just before they wrapped around Hidan's ankle, and just as Itachi tackled him out of the way.

Sharingan activated eyes met his, and a nod of approval was given just before the ground quaked and the beast sprang from it, tossing soil everywhere.

Shikamaru sent a few more shadow tendrils out to wrap around it before it could do any more damage, but the monster, as if made of liquid, quickly wormed its way out and took off like a rocket toward Hidan.

Finally aware of the situation Hidan easily leaped back, pulling out a retractable pike and swinging it until it reached its full length. "C'MON FUCKER!" He snarled, lunging toward it and swinging.

Shikamaru, temporarily distracted as he watched Hidan stab and slice through the beast only for it to reform itself, nearly jumped out of his skin when a blue hand reached down and grabbed him by the back of his vest, pulling him free of the demolished car and hoisting him up to his feet all in one smooth motion.

"Sorry about your car.." The shark man said, grinning and scratching his head. Then he tossed something up that glinted in the light before taking off to assist Hidan and now Itachi too with killing Kakuzu's minion.

Holding his hand out, Shikamaru almost lost it when the keys fell into his palm. Instead he just closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and dropped them to the dirt below. He was about to sit himself down and try his damndest to recover when his body was suddenly covered in a shadow. With not a trillionth of a second to spare he dove forward, nearly feeling the breeze from the arm that had almost wrapped itself around his neck. He cried out when he hit the ground and rolled as a fresh wave of agony zapped through him, but he was on his feet and facing his attacker in a heartbeat.

The man hadn't moved. But he didn't need to. Shikamaru's heart dropped to his belly and his stomach lurched so violently that for a moment he thought he might throw up and pass out. He pulled the

weapon he'd grabbed previously from his pocket and ignited it with a dark purple-black flame, holding it defensively in front of him.

Red and green, pupiless eyes seemed to laugh at him in his sorry state.

It was Kakuzu, in the flesh. Without his mask, he was quite possibly even more terrifying. His long chocolate hair shifted gently in the small breeze, and the stitches that stretched from the corners of his mouth back into some unseeable spot gave him a petrifying permanent smile.

Wearing only a halter-top type shirt, his stitches as every joint were exposed, making him look like some sort of terrifying science experiment gone wrong. Shikamaru gulped audibly as the monster his three comrades had been fighting landed heavily behind him, clicking deep within its body as if laughing at them.

Daddy's home, now you're fucked.

Indeed they were.. Shikamaru thought. Fucked in the worst possible way.

A/N-

WHOOOOO!

I'M SO FUCKING EXCITED THAT KAKUZU'S BACK AND HAS A MUCH BIGGER ROLE THAN IN THE LAST ONE! I CAN'T STOP TYPING IN CAPS!

Oh, there we go. That's better. Sorry for yelling. Heh, I looove Kuzu, You all shoulda known I couldn't kill him. It's not in my heart... but it is in my heart to let him wreck the everloving piss out of everything and rage to his 5 little hearts content.

Anyway, did you all enjoy Jashin? I did, and Fluffy has a crush on him now. xD By the way, if any of you like to draw or know of someone who does requests, tell them to make me some fanart. That would quite literally be the best fucking thing that could ever happen in the whole history of history.

Well, not the *best* thing, but pretty fucking close.

Whoo! One seriously action packed chapter! I hope you guys enjoy because I'm exhausted after writing that, and pumped all the fuck up at the same time. Hopefully I prolonged it long enough and it wasn't just like.. wham-bam-nowyou'refucked.

I don't even know if that last phrase made sense.

ANYWAY I should get going so I can hurry up and start on the next chappieeee. I'm not for absolute sure how many more there are, so I'm not going to tell you, but unfortunatley we are getting very near the end.

So, REEEHHHEEEEE VIIIEEEWWWW! And I shall give you all wonderful cake made by 'The official Jashin Impersonator' himself!

I love you all, thank you so much for reading, and have a wonderful night/weekend.

Troublesome ex's

Recurring Nightmares

The silence Kakuzu regarded him in was overwhelming. The other three Akatsuki members had gone just as quiet and still back behind.

Pale green irises shifted, seeming to land on all three of them before they finally came to a rest on Hidan, Or at least that's who Shikamaru assumed it was seeing as they narrowed in anger.

Kakuzu moved so quickly that the Nara didn't even have time to tell his body to do something before the elder man's hand detached itself from his body and shot like a rocket. He heard a choking noise behind him and whirled just in time to see Hidan yanked forward by the throat, caught too far off guard to even resist. In another second he was being held off the ground by Kakuzu, his arm reattached, and Shikamaru fought off a wave of nausea as Hidan's legs kicked and flailed beneath him.

The man could detach his fucking limbs!? And he had five hearts?! AND he had some kind of weird demon monster sidekick!? Jashin fucking christ...

"Hidan.." Kakuzu said in that deep gravelly voice. Shikamaru wanted to help, he wanted to jump forward and cut the bastards arm off and free his Hidan from the son of a bitch's chokehold. But he knew he shouldn't. Itachi was making no move to assist, and before he could get upset about the fact he reminded himself that Hidan had survived far worse things under the terrifyingly powerful man's influence. Intervening now would do nothing but piss Kakuzu off.

"Would you care to explain to me where my house went?" He said, squeezing tighter and making Hidan struggle more. "And all my *moneeyy* ?" He all but growled the last word, nose crinkling and brows furrowing in anger. Shikamaru couldn't help but stare,

especially at his mouth when he spoke. Those stitches... it was just creepy.

"Kakuzu.."

It was Itachi who finally spoke up, breaking the sound of Hidan slowly suffocating, with his voice even more calm than usual in an attempt to soothe the older man's anger. "You were gone for 5 months, we had no idea where you were, none of us could locate you, we thought you were dead. Hidan... thought you were dead. You must understand that he did what he did out of sorrow misplaced as anger. It was not his usual mischief."

Kakuzu looked up at him, staring emotionlessly for a few moments before speaking. "I was trapped nearly 400 feet below the ground in an abandoned government laboratory that used to conduct illegal genetic tests on live humans. You must not have looked for me too thoroughly." Kakuzu stated matter-of-factly, still holding a thrashing Hidan a foot off the ground with ease.

Shikamaru's eyes widened...

"We did though. You really expect us to go turning every stone? You are our best tracker, without you we had no chance of locating you, despite all our efforts." Itachi said calmly, taking a small step forward.

Kakuzu's face clenched in further anger, and without any effort at all, slammed the struggling man in his arms into the ground. "Would you like to know what happened to me?" He stated with an undertone that made the Nara's blood run cold.

He didn't want to know. Not in the least. For someone to be able to successfully capture this horrifically strong man... the means they would have to go to.. no, he didn't want to know. But he had a feeling Kakuzu was going to regale them with the story anyway. He took a slow deep breath, wincing at a small stab of pain and steeling himself. This was going to be gruesome, most likely. Though he

didn't know the man well enough to predict how in-detail he would go.

"I was ambushed, by at least fifty men. I killed twenty of them, but they performed some sort of... *ritual*. And trapped me within a salt circle." He glared down at Hidan, who was on his hands and knees coughing his life away. "They were all followers of your putrid God." He spat, and the Jashinist below him looked up with suspicious but wide eyes.

"It was not jutsu they used, so I could not break out. I have no idea what kind of black magic they were using, but I had no way of knowing how to break it. I was helpless." He growled, and Shikamaru swallowed. He couldn't imagine how that felt, actually, he had a good idea. he'd stood by and watched Hidan and Itachi battle with Sasuke, helpless to do anything. But Kakuzu's case was different in the fact that he was the one being attacked, unable to do anything to defend himself.

"They could attack me but I could not break through that damned forcefield they put up. I was bombarded with attack after attack after attack. I couldn't keep my stone skin technique up long enough to protect myself. They continued striking with their relative jutsu's while I was stuck in that bubble. Four times they killed me, nearly five. But just before the final strike, they stopped."

There was silence for a moment, Shikamaru strained to hear over the sound of his own heartbeat. His eyes flicked back and forth from Kakuzu to Hidan, terrified to do anything but nearly dieing inside as he watched his seemingly helpless lover stare up at the ghost of his past. He could only see the back of his head and partially the side of the zealot's face, but he could imagine the emotional torment in those beautiful violet eyes without having to see. This story was even worse than being dead, he'd literally been tortured. Even worse than the way he, Shikamaru and even Neji had been. It was not psychological, it was actual, *real* torture. And by Jashinists no less...

Suddenly Kakuzu swung his foot, and Hidan made an indescribable sound of pain and surprise as it caught his chin and sent him rolling backward.

Shikamaru nearly doubled over at the almost tangible pain his sudden rush of anger at this action caused. Hidan wasn't even trying to fight back, he stayed laying on his stomach on the ground except for propping himself on his elbows and panting.

"They took me into that fucking lab and they removed my heart and put it in a jar. They *dissected* me and did experiments on me like a fucking animal. Trying to figure out the key to my abilities, how they could apply it to themselves, how they could gain immortality without being truly immortal, like a certain someone I know..."

"Kakuzu, that had nothing to do with Hidan, there's no need to be so cruel!"

"You have no idea what cruelty is until you've gone through what I just did." The elder man growled, interrupting the Uchiha. "Have you ever been helpless in a glass container, watching through eyes that didn't exist as they poke and prod your body? As they cut into your flesh and bones, rearrange your organs, all for the sake of being closer to some ASENINE, MADE-UP DEITY!?" He roared, making the monster behind him shudder. "Even with my heart no longer in my body I can feel, I can sense, I can see chakra patterns. It's how I maintain control of them." He nodded his head sideways toward the beast sitting loyally behind him. "I felt every incision they made, every prod, every movement, and could not even scream from the pain. They tried to put animal hearts in my body, to test their idiotic theories and hypothesis. I had the heart of a *fucking pig* in my chest... I've never been so insulted in my life."

Shikamaru was going to be sick, or that's what he would be thinking if he wasn't currently fighting what he instantly recognized as a Jashin attack.

"So no, it was not directly his fault. But those men knew of him, and they knew that I associated with him. Because their *God* would not allow them to do such things to Hidan, they went after me instead. Sent me on a false bounty hunt, and I walked right into their trap. I was tricked by a group of men *a quarter* my age." He said, never breaking eye contact with Hidan the whole time, as if it were still his fault even though he'd admitted it wasn't. "So forgive me for being a little *upset* with him for dragging me into religious warfare."

It was so ironic that it was almost funny. Jashinists wanted Kakuzu's abilities, and Jashin himself wanted Neji's soul. And here Hidan and Shikamaru were taking all the bullshit from it. Such a cruel God, Jashin was... But never without reason.

"How did you get out?" Shikamaru said unwillingly, half of him wanting to shrink back when Kakuzu's exotic eyes landed on him, the other half wanting to punch him so hard in the face that he would need surgery to reconstruct it. He honestly was curious, and at the same time he just wanted to keep the man talking, keep him distracted so he wouldn't abuse the pitiful pile of Jashinist on the ground below him, cowering like a betrayed puppy.

The deeply tanned man did not answer immediately, he merely studied him for what felt like an eternity. "You're the brat that buried Hidan most recently... I thought so but I wasn't sure until you spoke. You've changed... I assume you were trying to kill him off again?"

Damn, Shikamaru's hands were shaking, his jaw was sore from gritting his teeth. Jashin really, *really* wanted him to attack Kakuzu. And he wanted to attack the man too, he was being completely unreasonable... He could understand the means, Jashin was helping him, boosting his power so he could fight evenly with the man and possibly kill him for good, removing him from the equation and ensuring that Hidan remained his. Jashin was trying to answer his prayers, and quite possibly get himself a soul to snack on in the process.

But that's not how I do things.

Jashinist or not, Shikamaru did not kill blindly, no matter how he'd changed. He would not kill someone just to get what he wanted, especially someone like Kakuzu who had really done him no direct harm. And aside from that, it may have the opposite effect anyway, what if he did manage to kill him and Hidan turned against him instead? The older man was near and dear to the albino, despite the violence between them.

"You don't seem to be against him though." Kakuzu stated with one brow raising. "In fact you look shocked to see me treat him like this.. as if you've become friends. It seems I've missed something."

"Kakuzu..." Came Itachi's voice, tearing the old man's heavy gaze mercilessly away from the spikey haired Jashinist to land on the Uchiha. "Shikamaru's presence is a very long story that I would be happy to explain to you when you are calm and rational."

"I don't care about his presence." Kakuzu said quickly, his eyes flitting back to Shikamaru. "I'm just interested in why he looks as if he wants to kill me, and why his chakra is suddenly so chaotic." He turned ever so slightly, a small smirk on his lips. "You want to fight me boy? Have at it, you promise far more of a challenge than Hidan, and I'd appreciate an outlet."

With that he snapped. Shikamaru finally snapped. He felt it, a painful sting deep in his chest like a cord breaking. More power forced its way into him to the point where his very skin felt as if it were on fire. He was vaguely aware of the steam rising from his wounds as they all healed themselves with unbelievable speed. He could see the glow of his body as pure, bloodred chakra enveloped him. That wasn't the color of his own chakra, it must be coming directly from Jashin.

He tried to scream, to let Itachi, or Hidan, or hell, even Kisame know that he had no control anymore. The reigns had been ripped violently from his hands and all he could do is watch through his own eyes before his thoughts were clouded over with Jashin's possession.

He felt his lips stretch into a sneer, and pictured in his mind Jashin's smile, so gorgeous and deadly. Kakuzu's brows arced up high at this, but he did not speak and he did not move.

The image of him kicking Hidan so heartlessly flooded his mind, repeating over and over again with ever increasing succession to the point where he wanted to scream again, but this time because of the rage that filled him. How could he treat him like that? How could he so carelessly beat him, like Hidan was more of a pet than his romantic partner? The zealot loved Kakuzu and in return was constantly treated like some heavy burden to bear, as if Kakuzu were obligated to be with him because he couldn't take care of himself. As if he were motherless child he was forced into adopting.

How dare he! That was not Kakuzu's Hidan any longer. He was *his*, he was *Shika's* Hidan. And No one fucked with his man like that. Not as long as there was life left in him, not as long as Jashin was on his side.

Shikamaru would rip every last heart out and stomp it into the dirt, damn the consequences!

He heard Itachi distantly shout his name as he bolted, snarling like an animal and pumping even more chakra into his weapon. Kakuzu didn't move but for one single step with each swing. Taunting him, laughing at him. It only fueled the fire.

The dark-skinned man drew back a fist and slammed it into his Jashin-possessed opponent, but at the last second he tossed his weapon into the air and caught the dark-skinned fist with both hands, skidding backward only slightly. He looked down for a second to note that Kakuzu's skin had darkened to black, and he felt more as if he were holding a rock than flesh.

He twisted and danced around behind the man, yanking his arm upward into a hold that would make anyone else bend over to escape the pain.

But Kakuzu's hand just detached from itself at the wrist and he twirled his body on heel, swinging his leg into a roundhouse. Just before it connected Shikamaru's machete came hurdling back down, he caught it and without missing a beat swung while forcing it full of chakra, slicing through Kakuzu's leg and sending it rolling.

The older man did nothing more than wince before doing a few backward handsprings, somehow managing to balance on one foot.

Shikamaru wasted no time in charging after him, but he was tackled from the side and sent into a roll he quickly recovered from. He glared at Kakuzu's monster, opening its mouth with a crack and gathering a rotating ball of compressed air before launching it toward him.

A distraction. He immediately recognized as he again swung the blade, releasing a dark purple ripple through the air that moved far too fast for the beast to leap to safety. It sliced through the ball of air and the thread-minion was struck and immediately began writhing and thrashing, then falling limply on the ground.

He didn't take the time to watch before he turned on a dime and rocketed off toward Kakuzu, who had made it to his dismembered leg and was reattaching it to himself by means of threads spurting from his body like tentacles.

Immediately Shikamaru pulled another blade from his pocket, one made of chakra enhancing metal, He tossed it into the ground amidst Kakuzu's shadow before lunging. He reveled in the confused look on Kakuzu's face as he realized he had him in his shadow possession only for a moment before something grabbed his ankle and he was pulled from the air and slammed onto his back. The oxygen in his lungs whooshed out once before he was being slung around again like a ragdoll and collided with the ground. He felt the cracking of his bones and couldn't help the insane laugh/moan that escaped him as the pain converted itself to pleasure and his body healed itself almost immediately.

"Holy *shit*..." He heard Kisame mutter from far off.

Whatever had a hold on him had let go, and he flipped back to his feet to see Kakuzu's hand retracting back to his arm, he had the chakra blade in his other, and tossed it behind him carelessly.

"I don't know what you did to yourself, but I have to commend you for it."

Shikamaru bared his teeth and shot forward, Kakuzu stayed calmly where he was yet again, side-stepping every swing of Shikamaru's blade. With his free hand Shikamaru put two fingers to his lips and three dimensional shadow tentacles shot up from the shadows on the ground around them, slashing and whipping around in a barrage that should be impossible to dodge. And Kakuzu didn't dodge at all, his entire body went black, and he reached out and clapped his hands together just as Shikamaru swung at him again, catching the blade between his palms.

But it didn't deter the Nara, he only sneered, giving Kakuzu no time to do anything except widen his eyes before he forced his enhanced chakra through the metal and into Kakuzu. The elder man's body siffened and he made a small choking sound before Shikamaru pooled more liquid power in his foot and lifted it, coiling it against his body before pushing with all his might.

The air pulsed out around them at impact and Kakuzu went flying backward too fast to see.

"Jesus fucking- that kid's a *badass*! !" Kisame exclaimed no more than a second before Shikamaru was slammed into by a threaded, roaring mass of threads. Fuck, he wished the Shark-man would just shut the hell up.

The two bodies rolled across the ground until Shikamaru forced himself on top. Gripping the eye holes of the mask tightly with one hand to keep the beast still, he plunged his other into the stringy body of the beast until he felt the thumping clump in the middle. He

latched onto it, and snarling viciously over the shrieking of the monster he pumped a heart-stopping amount of chakra directly into it's life organ. He continued his voiced raging until it stopped squirming and practically melted underneath him, the mask finally shattering to signify it's death.

He panted for awhile, still seated, enjoying the small victory. There was one heart down, if he was assuming correctly. Based on what Itachi told him and also what he'd gathered from the old man's speech, Kakuzu had five hearts, and used them in the stringy minions to give them their own seperate life while still sharing a mind.

He took a deep breath and shot to his feet, scanning the area almost frantically in search Kakuzu as his breath heaved in and out of him through bared teeth. He wanted to laugh maniacally at the amazing amount of power still left over even after using so much. The living rag-doll would die in this very feild if he didn't surrender. Shikamaru would make sure of it, Jashin would make sure of it. He was so pissed at the moment that he would even go so far as to sacrifice one of his stupid multiple hearts if he had to, as a little 'Thank You' to Jashin for the power boost.

His eyes lighted on the blur of Kakuzu's form racing toward him.

He lifted a single hand and caught the blackened fist, glaring into green iris and red sclera as the balls of his feet dug into the earth from the force of the attack, and with the turn of his wrist he slammed the man into the ground and stomped down onto his chest, then letting out a short laugh when he heard the grunt of pain. He grabbed him by the shirt and lifted him up only to be caught under the chin by a knee and knocked backward, forced to free Kakuzu, who followed him with a barrage of punches and kicks that he evaded with speed that amazed even himself.

He spun and crouched, extending his leg and catching his opponents ankles, knocking him to the ground for only an instant

before he flipped backward and Shikamaru charged him, shrilling much like Hidan always did in excitement.

His machete was knocked finally from his hand, but he didn't fret. He didn't need it anyway, making a chakra blade from his flattened hand he reared back and laughed out loud again when it went through Kakuzu's chest and the man's eyes went wide as Shikamaru made a fist around his heart. Freezing for a heartbeat to enjoy the moment he once again forced chakra into it, Kakuzu choked and seized before the insane-with-power Jashinist ripped out his hand and the elder man fell to his knees.

Two down, three to go.

"SHIKAMARU STOP!" He heard Itachi shout, but ignored him. He couldn't stop if he wanted to, he had no control, and he was reveling in the ecstasy of Jashin's borrowed power. He wanted to fight more, his body was buzzing with the need to move, the need to attack, the need to kill and destroy. He wanted to laugh and scream at the same time and feel the sweet thrill of shoving something through someones flesh. If his opponent didn't get back on his feet soon he may very well turn on his two allies behind him.

They couldn't stop him, no one could. *He was a God!* He could do anything! He was unbeatable, unbreakable. No amount of force in the world could stop Jashin's power, he was like The Hulk on steroids!

Kakuzu's body exploded then, a vicious series of tearing and ripping noises filling the air as gray threads shot from every seam. Shikamaru was grabbed by both wrists and ankles and yanked forward, inches from those multicolored eyes, practically on fire with pure wrath.

"I will NOT be humiliated any futher by a CHILD!" Kakuzu's deep voice snarled through the hunk of strings hanging out his now distorted mouth. Shikamaru was flung again and slammed onto the

ground once, twice, three times before his swirling vision locked eyes with the monster of a man again.

Pain exploded in his chest when threads tore into his flesh, and blood spurted from him as the threads pierced through what he knew was his own heart.

Everything came to a screeching halt, and time slowed again to a near standstill. He could hear shouting, someone called his name, but he couldn't move. He stared with eyes like saucers at a grinning Kakuzu.

No.. no.. He couldn't be beaten. He couldn't be killed. He was invincible. He could not fail, not Hidan or Jashin. He had to make this man pay for the way he treated Hidan, for valueing money, peices of fucking *paper* over human life.

"Game over." His opponent's deep voice rumbled, and Shikamaru's vision went cloudy around the edges. Jashin's power flooded from him and he was left alone with the all-consuming pain, returning to awareness.

Jashin.. no.. don't give up on me. I can still fight. Just heal me up.. Heal me and I'll kill him I swear...

He gargled out an unrecognizable word before a pale body collided with Kakuzu's, and the Nara was torn from his grip. Again he tried to cry out when his body collapsed on itself and crashed to the ground, but he couldn't, only a fountian of blood ran through his teeth and over his lips. The blinding white continued to slowly consume his vision as he stared up at a clear blue sky.

"*YOU SON OF A BITCH!*" He heard Hidan's strained and muffled voice cry out. Another form leaped over Shikamaru, he couldn't focus enough to see who it was, but reasoned in the back of his mind that it must have been Kisame when delicate hands wrapped themselves under his arms and pulled. He couldn't muster the strength to voice

the pain that racked him as his body was pulled backward, across the rocky, uneven soil and away from the continued sounds of battle.

Itachi's voice said his name, so far away, and a pair of soft, cold hand pressed onto his cheeks before everything went black.

xx

"Shikamaru Nara." Came that familiar bone-rattling voice. "I grant you this only because I am curious as to how you will use it."

The memory of the beautiful demon God appeared, hazy around the edges.

"You wish to take the Hyga curse onto yourself, but what you haven't taken into account is the blood bond you have created with Hidan. You would give your soul to me in order to save Neji, but you have yet to realize just how precious your soul has become."

It was the dream he'd had, replaying in his mind while he watched through eyes that were his own, but not. Jashin smiled at him as they walked, an arm draped over his shoulder as if they were the closest of friends.

"You have bound my most lyal deciple to you through the sharing of each other's blood while inside my circle. Hidan has never before shared with another Jashinist lover such as yourself, and thusly is just as ignorant to the effects as you are."

"What... what do you mean?" He'd asked, receiving a delightfully evil chuckle in response.

"I'm sure you're aware of Hidan gaining the use of your abilities. And it works both ways, my child. You have sucessfully gained his immortality through him."

"Whaat?!"

"Yes, it seems the two of you are now the lone souls on this planet who cannot die. This of course means I will be expecting souls from you as well."

Shikmaru considered this, He was immortal? How... how could this have happened? No wonder he'd managed to pull through being stabbed through the lungs. How could it never have occurred to him? That meant.. he was still alive. That's right! He was battling with Kakuzu, he'd wanted to kill him for some reason, though he couldn't figure out why now. It had just been Jashin magnifying his anger again, blinding him to reason and logic.

"What.. what about Neji?" He asked, remembering why he'd made the deal in the first place. Surely the Hyuga could be taken completely out of the equation now. Surely, after all this, he would not have to continue sacrificing himself to save the helpless brunette.

"He is free to continue living. But in the place of his soul, you and Hidan need to offer me not only your own blood, but he needs to give me yours at least twice a year. And quite a bit of it, in place of your soul. It's far too precious for me to consume."

He'd took a deep breath. He could work with that, he thought. It would be a troublesome struggle, but he could track down murderers and rapists, people who deserved to be punished for their crimes, people who would slip through the justice system with nothing more than a slap on the hand. He could turn the curse into a gift, use it for good instead of evil. He could do it, surely he could take the lives of those who deserved death to save those who didn't. A soul was a soul.

"The bond you two have conceived is something that cannot be broken and is not to be taken lightly, especially with this new twist you have added. If an offering fails to be made you will both die. I do not give out such gracious gifts freely, and I will not be sending reminders every time I thirst for your blood. If you forget, you will die and Hidan will die."

"I... I understand." He said meekly. It wasn't as if he could haggle with the God of slaughter. He was being incredibly generous as it was. For someone so merciful and cruel, he didn't seem like such a bad guy.. Though.. this was a dream. Or a memory of a dream..

No, no.. Remember what he said. Stop doubting yourself, stop doubting *him*.

"Good. Now you need to wake up. A battle is in the near future and I'm very interested to see how you will use what I have given you during it. Goodbye, my son." The beautiful God gave him a wickedly sensual smile before turning and walking off ahead of him, fading into the darkness.

Shikamaru stared, only now understanding what he had meant by that. It appeared Jashin had a sense of humor as well...

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Glazed over eyes stared up into another pair of equally dark ones, creased at the edges in grief.

"His pulse is gone.." Itachi's voice rang, echoing in a way he'd never remembered it doing.

"Damn.." Kisame's said with the same quality. "He put up one hell of a fight."

"He was possessed by Jashin..."

"You mean that made up God that Crap-for-brains is always shouting about?"

"Yes. Shikamaru was a Jashinist. Complications of his relationship with Hidan."

Itachi was paraphrasing. But that was okay, he didn't want the whole world knowing his secrets. He could feel his body, unbearably heavy but exquisitely light at the same time. He could vaguely hear Hidan's

pained shouts in the background, Kakuzu growling back inbetween clangs of metal.

A single beat had an unbelievable energy rushing through him, and at the second heartbeat he gasped and shot upright. The two standing over him gawked as he caught his breath, trying not to moan from the pleasure as his heart healed itself. Ohh that was better than sex...

"YOU SAID HE WAS DEAD!" Kisame exclaimed.

Itachi continued staring in a mixture of confusion and horror.
"Shikamaru..."

Itachi was ignored as the Naras eyes lighted on the battle between Kakuzu and Hidan, it was over, already it seemed. The dark-skinned man was back into a normal form, straddled over the immortal below him, both hands squeezing his throat.

In a split second Shikamaru was on his feet, not even thinking about it as he sharpened his hand into a blade and pushed off. He darted in an arc, coming up behind Kakuzu and shoving his hand through his flesh and life-organ alike without hesitation. So what if he wasn't possessed anymore? Hidan was still in trouble. So what if he was immortal? Kakuzu was still a bastard.

The elder man cried out and stiffened, and Hidan's face lost all tension aside from his eyes stretching so wide that Shika thought for a second they might pop right out of the sockets.

That makes three.

Kakuzu's body went limp and collapsed, immediatly shoved off of the body below him.

Hidan sat up, rubbing his neck and gawking at Shikamaru.
"Pineapple head... you're alive?"

He nodded, extending a hand to help the silver hair to his feet.

"But... he got your heart.. you mortals don't survive that shit.." He absently grabbed on and hoisted himself up.

"Glad to see you too Hidan." Shikamaru said robotically, his eyes flicking down to Kakuzu. There was no time to chit-chat. He would be back up in a second, and they needed to get away.

The body shifted, and something beneath the dark skin rearranged itself. Gross.

"I'll explain later." He said, walking backward in the direction of the other two Akasuki members. Hidan started to follow before stopping, realization passing over his features. Shikamaru met his eyes, and the two stared at each other until Kakuzu grunted and pulled himself to his hands and knees.

"Unless you want to lose another heart, I suggest you not attack me anymore." the spikey haired man said, stepping back into a defensive position. *Please Jashin don't let him call my bluff.* Without that extra boost there was no way he could take him on again. The heart count would stop at three.

"You insufferable brat." The older man spat out, "Why are you still alive?"

"Maybe you would know if you had let Itachi explain instead of taunting me."

Kakuzu silently rose to his feet, turning around calmly to study Shikamaru. "You were just a twig of a man last time I saw you, unable to even save your little boyfriend from Hidan without assistance. And now you've bested me three times... No one improves so much in so little time."

"I had a little help..." The spikey haired Jashinist admitted, letting gaze wander over to a still-in-shock Hidan. And also, two years

wouldn't really be considered 'so little time'. It was a long time, an extremely long time, in fact. But it was true, he *had* been trying to improve himself ever since they'd moved, and while he had taken some pretty huge steps, he could not have done what he just did without the aid of the Slaughter God.

Kakuzu's eyes narrowed as he followed the vision trail. Then they narrowed even further as it finally dawned on him. There was an uncomfortable silence for what seemed like an eternity, before every single one of them nearly had a heart attack at the grisley laugh that exploded from the stitched up man.

"You and Hidan? Ohh that's precious. Honestly I would have never thought it possible, no wonder I didn't realize sooner." He smoothed back his bangs, seeming to have become an entirely different person.

"Hidan tried to kill me again a few weeks ago. I beat him but spared his life, a decision I'm not always sure I don't regret..." He said, eyeing Hidan sideways with a slight crook of his lips. "But somehow among the whole mess I got involved with Jashin. Apparently he likes me. What you just witnessed was just a small dose, piss me off again and you'll witness the full extent of his power." Shikamaru said, overcome with an extreme weariness that had him nearly nodding off on the spot. Yeah, okay, he was bluffing again. So what? If it would keep the old man from attacking him then who the hell cares? He looked up to meet the stoic man's eyes, still frustrated at being unable to read him. He cleared his throat, setting his mind back on track. "I don't care to explain the details. But he thought you were dead, and Neji had left me long ago. We.. we were broken and lonely..." He didn't want to show such emotions in front of the solemn man before him. But he had to make him understand, while he was being reasonable. Surely he could understand, surely he would sympathize at least the smallest bit.

"And it struck you as a good idea to hook up with him?" Kakuzu finished for him, raising a brow. "You have no idea what kind of pain in the ass you've accepted into your life.."

Shikamaru relaxed on the inside, the man didn't seem to have any further interest in killing him. And he really didn't even seem mad about their involvement with each other. Perhaps he didn't know just *how* involved they'd got, but he was a wise, experienced man.. he probably assumed..

"Oh, I'm well aware. Trust me. But you know, he's not so bad when you actually treat him like a person."

Kakuzu's eyes narrowed again. "Watch yourself boy. Or maybe I'll take him back."

"I'd like to see you try!" Shikamaru shot back, then a pair of pale fists hit both men in the jaw. Shikamaru recoiled, blinking a few times before looking back at Hidan incredulously. Did he just fucking hit him? What the fuck? The zealot had *never* hit Shikamaru before, not unless they were in an actual fight. Kakuzu's presence was already having an adverse affect on his lover. Son of a *bitch* that hurt! He was definitely going to have to knock him around later...

"HEY! I'm right fucking here! And I'm not a goddamn prize to be won!" Hidan shouted, placing himself between the two, scowling only briefly before his normal grin spread across him. "Though it is fucking flattering to have you fighting over me, seriously."

"Hidan, may I suggest something?" Itachi said, suddenly beside Shikamaru. Violet eyes studied him for a moment, serious again, before sighing.

"I fucking guess.."

Itachi cleared his throat, waiting until all three men's attention was on him. "A lot has transpired during this little... roadtrip. Why don't we go our seperate ways for the night and reconvene tomorrow. Then we can hash out all the details in a dignified manner." He eyed each of the battered men as he spoke, and Shikamaru instantly slumped at his words.

"That sounds like the best plan ever... seriously." He muttered, causing all eyes to focus on him.

Oh shit, he just did the sounding-like-Hidan thing again didn't he?

Kakuzu sighed, closing his eyes and absently rubbing his jaw where he'd been struck. "Perhaps I've been a bit... *childish*... But fine. However I have no money or a place to rest."

"Yeah, me fucking too!" Hidan snapped, glaring at Itachi, who in turned looked to Shikamaru, Either oblivious to the reference of him destroying Hidan's residence or ignoring the accusation entirely.

He blinked. "Oh hell no! I've had enough of you crazy fucking Akatsuki people! My apartment is off limits! Besides, I still have to .. eh... clean it up." He studded, earning a laugh from Kisame.

"Tch. Whatever pineapple head, you cruel bastard. Me and Kuzu can find some cheapy hotel like good ol' times eh?" Hidan said, nudging the man beside him with his elbow.

Damn, they made up fast.. Not that he shouldn't have expected it after living next to them two years ago...

"Don't call me that. And in case you didn't hear me, I have no money. You burned it all up, idiot." The older man growled.

Itachi sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose while Shikamaru warred within himself. Hidan and Kakuzu in a room together all night...? No.. no he didn't want that. But he couldn't start another fight over the albino. He couldn't let his angry jealousy control him, lest he go into another episode. They were finally at a truce, if he fucked that up then he would never forgive himself.

Besides, Kakuzu *couldn't* take Hidan away. He was Shikamaru's by blood bond.

"I will loan you money, Kakuzu. I know that you're good for it, as long as we get the hell out of here. My head is killing me." Itachi sighed, and Kisame shifted nervously behind him.

"Ehh, well the problem here is that the car is totaled. Soo... we gotta hike back to town."

"That's not a problem." Itachi replied, eyeing Shikamaru. "The only reason we drove was because of Shikamaru's injuries, which I'm assuming have throughly healed."

The Nara smiled sheepishly. Yeah, he still had some explaining to do... but at least it would wait until tomorrow.

Itachi handed Kakuzu a small slip of paper. "My temporary residence, meet me there and I will give you enough for a room and a meal. To the rest of you, I'll contact you with where we will meet tomorrow."

With that, the Uchiha burst into crows, and Kisame offered a short salute and a sharkey grin before melting into a puddle behind him.

Shikamaru sighed before stiffening. *Damn...* He was alone with Hidan and Kakuzu... And *double damn*, he might have to walk home...

Triple damn ! He had no idea where he was. He was going to have to follow them. Shit on a stick...

"Eehh, this is awkward huh?" Hidan said, voicing Shikamaru's thoughts.

Kakuzu sighed and turned around, stuffing the note in his pocket and starting off a slow walk.

Hidan and Shikamaru stared after him for a few heartbeats before they exchanged glances. Hidan whirled and jogged after him. "Oi! Kakuzu wait up!"

Shikamaru kicked at the dirt for a moment before throwing his head back and groaning dramatically, then took off after them to catch up.

Such a drag...

A/N-

WHAAT!? Two days in a roww!?

Uh, hell yes. I was super excited to get this done. It was so fun, holy shit I can't even explain. Hopefully it was a satisfying enough fight for you, I actually intended it to get a fuckload more crazy and like, level buildings and stuff... but unfortunately I have a real life that needs attended to preeetty badly. So I cut it a little short.

Anyways, I hope everything made sense, forgive the typos, I love you, and REVIEW!

P.S. I think there's about.. 2 more chapters left, plus an epilogue, and then I'm going to give you all another bonus chapter. Because I'm just such a nice person.

Bittersweet

Recurring Nightmares

Dingy motel rooms. Hard, disgusting mattresses. Cheap toiletpaper.

He sighed, why did it all seem so glorious?

"Move the fuck over Kuzu, I'm fuckin' exhausted." He was shoved aside by an albino idiot, and even that small bit of happiness trickled out, replaced by anger.

Hidan clicked his tongue while looking around the room, hands on his hips. "Damn... you still know how to pick'em. This place is shit."

Counting to ten, the older man walked silently past him. Why had he agreed to Hidan spending the night with him again? Oh, right, so he could throttle him in peace. Yeah.. that was the *only* reason...

"Kuzu? Awe don't give me the fuckin' silent treatment! I haven't seen you in a goddamn year and you act like you aren't even happy to see me!"

"Shut up Hidan."

"Are you still mad? C'mon Kuzu... Don't be a grumpy old man, so not sexy."

Kakuzu jerked around to glare the moron into silence, surprised to find him so close that their foreheads nearly smashed together. Intimidation had no effect on Hidan, he was obviously over whatever submissive mood he'd been in earlier. Damn that ponytail kid...

Hidan smiled at him. A real smile, not that brainless grin he always had plastered on his face, but a smile that reflected in his soft, violet eyes...

Dammit, no. Don't do that to yourself. Hidan moved on, this arrangement is only for the night, then he goes back with whatever his name is. Pineapple head, Hidan calls him.

"I really missed you..." Hidan said softly, bringing his hand up to touch Kakuzu's face. The older man quickly grabbed his wrist and twisted roughly, ripping that smile from the albino's face and replacing it with a pained scowl.

"Gaahh! What the hell you old fuck?"

"I told you to shut up."

"Let go that fucking hurts!"

"I thought you liked pain."

"KNOCK IT OFF!" Hidan snarled, tearing his hand free. He glared at the older man for a moment before turning around and stalking to the bathroom. A moment later the sound of the shower nozzle running pervaded the air.

Good. He wanted to be alone anyway. Annoying, loud, vulgar brat. Let him throw his tantrum, he had nothing to be upset about. He'd apparently been having a hell of a time destroying and killing and sleeping around while Kakuzu had been stuck in that hellhole.

Hidan could just go wander off into traffic for all he cared. He'd rescued that idiot countless times out of his grave, so many nights spent digging away and hauling coffins out. So many nights spent sorting out body parts, stringing them back together. Not to mention all the money he /wasted/ moving from house to house to house every time the immortal fucked up and got himself killed. He had no idea how much it took for all those security deposits that they /never/ got back, all the moving vans, all the fucking sleepless nights he's stayed up trying to find a house with one of those stupid fucking tunnels beneath so Hidan wouldn't destroy the fucking bedroom when he dragged home his stupid sacrificial victims...

And the one time Kakuzu really needed him... He didn't come.

Stupid, spoiled, lazy, backstabbing brat!

Whatever... he wouldn't make the mistake again. Hidan would be out of his life permanently after tonight. From now on he went back to what had kept him alive all these years, looking out for number one. And no one else.

He sighed and sat on the edge of the bed, running a hand through his hair. Now, he had to start completely over. He had no clothes, which meant no /mask/. He would have to walk around with everyone gawking at his face and stitches. And he had... well hell he didn't have anything! He was in poverty!

UGH! Such a disgusting word..

Dammit Hidan... You couldn't just stay calm and be rational. Just this one time...

The sound of the water cut off and Kakuzu blinked. How long had he been sitting here brooding?

Damn, Hidan couldn't even take a nice long shower and leave him in peace.

Hidan emerged from the bathroom and Kakuzu quickly averted his gaze. So that was his trick, try to look sexy and lure forgiveness from him? *Nice try Hidan, I'm too old to fall for that.*

But a second later the door of the hotel room slammed and Kakuzu turned back in mild shock. He left? Without saying anything?

Good. He wanted to be alone anyway.. But.. then why was he angry?

Because, Hidan was being a little jerk right now. Throwing a tantrum for some probably stupid reason like always. And he had no goddamn right to act like *he* was the one who'd been wronged. He

was probably going over to his new little fuck-buddy's place just to spite the old man.

Well it wouldn't work. Fucking baby, fucking stupid ignorant Hidan... He would smack him around when he got back, or maybe just ignore him. That would drive the idiot crazy. Yeah, he'd do that when he came back... Whenever that would be... Hopefully soon..

Uh, not because he wanted him back. But because he was tired, he wanted to get some sleep without being woken up in the middle of the night by a drunken, high lunatic.

Yeah... that was why...

He pushed himself off the bed, leaning backward until his back popped, making him wince. Damn that ponytail kid gave him a run for his money. No pun intended.

How the hell had the scrawny little squirt managed to do all that? Kakuzu himself had been going full throttle and he had pretty well gotten ass handed to him until he whipped out the big guns. And even then...

Dammit.. he *knew* he got the kids heart. And he knew there was only one. And that didn't sit well with him. What the *fuck* did Hidan do while he was gone?

Again running a hand through his hair, he sighed. Why was he even thinking about this? It didn't concern him. Hidan would be out of his life soon and he could go back to the wonderful single life he'd had before.

Doing what he wanted, when he wanted. Not spending his money on stupid things, not getting calls at 3 am by the police, not picking up after a grown man...

Going to sleep and staying asleep with the whole bed to himself... alone. Coming home and not being greeted by a happy, smiling

idiot...

Silence all the time... sheer, uninterrupted silence... Monotony, no more bickering, or random tackle-hugs, or annoying little pale fingers picking at his mask, begging him just to show his face because it was 'the best thing ever, seriously'...

He shook his head and growled, stomping into the grundgy bathroom. *Get out of my head you insufferable moron!* He was mad at him, furious, he wanted to throttle him. Remember?

It had been so easy before, killing all those stupid men, imagining them to be Hidan as they cried out their useless religious mumbo-jumbo. He hadn't seen that stupid grinning face in a year, hadn't looked into those damn soft violet eyes and listened to his irritating voice saying his nickname in that accursedly cute manner...

GAAH DAMN IT ALL!

He turned the water on and stripped, grumbling almost inaudibly to himself.

Just don't think about it. *You are a grown-ass man. Hidan is just a nuisance and you didn't miss him and you don't care that he's with someone else* . Even if it is a snarky little pineapple headed son-of-a-bitch. Fucking ridiculous. Hidan only liked him because he believed in their bullshit god... that had to be the only reason. What the hell did that kid have that he didn't?

STOP IT!

He shoved his face into the stream of water, as if it would wash it all away. *You're going soft old man.. a kid knocked you on your ass and now you're jealous...*

"Shut up.." He said out loud. Great... now he was talking to himself. Damn that zealous, immortal, idiot. Getting under his skin like that. If Hidan were a snake, Kakuzu would be dead.

Hah... Hidan was more like a persistent fly. You could slap at it and kill it but somehow there was always something buzzing around, pissing you off. Threats don't work and violence doesn't work, and only when you learn to just live with it does it go away..

Just like right now... Now that he was used to his presence, it felt far too quiet and still without him. It felt wrong, horribly wrong. Like the calm before the storm except the calm just drug on and on while you sat there wasting your life away waiting for the storm that refused to come.

Damn... he hoped he came back soon. He'd never say it out loud, but as long as no one knew, he supposed he could just think it to himself...

xx

Hours passed, and it was well into the night. Kakuzu lay in bed on top of the covers, propping the back of his head on his forearms.

He stared at the ceiling in a statuesque manner, trying to calm the anger that rose within him at each passing minute. He didn't care where Hidan was, he didn't. It was a mantra repeated to himself over and over in his head.

He would *not* go after him. If he went after him then that would mean he cared and he didn't care.

Nope. Not at all.

He almost had himself convinced when his eyes started to droop and his weary body began relaxing. Damn it felt good to have a body again... He could focus on that. That was a good feeling, nothing confusing about it.

And then the door clicked and squeaked, and his eyes shot open. The anger flared right back up, and he gritted his teeth and rolled his head to look at the intruder.

Hidan paused mid-step, staring at him like a deer caught in headlights. He had a paper bag dangling from one hand, and Kakuzu's eyes shifted back and forth between the startled violet and brown bag.

"Uuh.. I thought you were asleep.." Hidan said, straightening up.

"I was until you barged in." He growled back.

Silver brows furrowed in anger. "I was quiet as shit! If the fucking doors in this shitty place didn't wake the goddamn dead you wouldn't have known I was here!"

"Where did you go?" Kakuzu asked, not moving from his reclined position.

Irritation turned briefly to confusion before switching back again on the Jashinist face. "Like you give a damn.."

"You're right. I don't."

"THEN WHY'D YOU FUCKING ASK!?"

"You woke me up."

"Tch. Whatever you're always mad at me for one thing or another. I don't even care... Here." The paper bag was tossed onto the foot of the bed. Kakuzu stared blankly at it before returning his attention to Hidan, who was removing his shirt beside the second bed. Kakuzu had gotten a room with a king size bed and then pulled the two twins apart. A single king size bed was cheaper than two queens, the motel didn't have anything smaller, and he definitely wasn't going to share a bed with Hidan after he'd been screwing or getting screwed by someone else. He didn't care what circumstances it had happened under.

"What's that."

Hidan turned around and sat, pulling off his shoes. "I... saved some of your clothes. Well, a mask and that duster you never really wore.. They survived red-eye's assault. I figured you probably didn't wanna walk around with your stitches showing like that.. I know it bugs you when people stare."

Kakuzu was silent as he regarded the somewhat somber man. He hadn't sworn in at least five sentences. Something must really be wrong with him.

"Why did you save them?"

Hidan just shrugged, not meeting his eyes. "They got mixed in with my stuff..."

"It was hanging in the back of my closet. You had to have deliberately grabbed it."

"Yeah well you're senile old mind must be fucking mistaken!" Hidan said, laying down and throwing the covers over himself. "This bed smells like sin."

"You can sleep on the floor if you want." The dark skinned man stated, sitting up to sift through the bag.

"Shut up Kakuzu."

He hesitated at this. *Kakuzu?* Not Kuzu or old man or shit eater? Just Kakuzu?

What the hell was wrong with him?

He pulled the trenchcoat from the bag, his nose wrinkling slightly. Shit, it was the hottest part of summer. He didn't want to wear this... but he really didn't want to go walking around all exposed. And leather... just wasn't his thing. Hidan swore up and down it made him look 'like a fucking sex god', but the material made him feel so

constricted.. Why had Hidan saved this stupid jacket instead of something more comfortable?

Dammit Hidan..

He pulled the mask out, and underneath that was a regular white t-shirt, and it didn't look like his. He didn't wear white.

"What's this?"

Hidan rolled back over to study the cloth in the elder man's hand. "A shirt. I think it'll fit you, it's kinda big on me. It's too fucking hot to walk around in a jacket, even though you probably will anyway you miser... "

"It's white." Kakuzu stated.

"Uh... yeah. And?"

"Hidan, have you ever seen me wear color?"

The Jashinist considered this for a moment. "You don't have to fucking wear it. Jashin, I was just trying to help..."

"You're a little late for that.." Kakuzu said, balling up the shirt and tossing it back in the sack. Hidan's head shot up from the pillow.

"The fuck is that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing. Be quiet so I can sleep." The elder said, clicking off the lamp and flooding the room in darkness. He rolled to face the wall, his back turned on Hidan, releasing a quiet sigh. He couldn't even determine what emotion he was feeling right now. He wasn't stupid enough to try and convince himself he hadn't missed the psycho at all. There was a reason they'd been together previous to this, after all. Something about that stupid albino psycho just... made the world better. Even though it made it worse at the same time. Kakuzu had seen for himself the deterioration of society, how every finely defined line had been blurred no matter what the topic. Hidan really was the

human incarnation of that, of everything he hated... it didn't make sense for him to feel the way he did about him.

Hidan listened, for about 5 minutes. "I looked for you..." He said softly. "Everywhere. I tracked you all the way to the place you said they caught you, I even found the engraved circle where they had the salt..."

Kakuzu remained facing the wall, not wanting to listen but unable to force himself to tell the silver hair to stop talking.

"You'd been gone for 3 months. It took two of them to even find any clue as to where you might be. The first one I just spent at home... Afraid that if I left you might come back and leave again and I wouldn't get to see you..."

He heard Hidan shift with the squeaking of old rusted mattress springs. He kept his eyes on the wall. *Don't come over here. Don't you dare.*

"Your blood was still staining that fucking cement. I found a piece of your mask stuck in some bushes, covered in blood. There was blood everywhere, all over the place, like they had taken you and ripped you apart and dragged you in five different directions. But I couldn't fucking figure out where they took you, or *who* even... I got so mad.. I was trying so fucking hard and I couldn't fucking help you. The one time you actually need my help and I can't do a single fucking thing..." His voice wavered, and Kakuzu couldn't help but roll quietly, straining to see the 'younger' man through the darkness.

He was leaning over the side of the bed, head lowered and his hands tightly gripping chunks of hair.

"I couldn't control myself.. I'm... I'm sorry okay? I can't even remember what happened, Red-eyes showed up somewhere in there and.. I almost killed him. I just couldn't stop killing people and when I ran out of people to kill I started breaking things and when I ran out of things to break I set the rubble on fire... nothing was ever

enough. I just kept screaming and screaming and screaming until I couldn't even do that anymore. It.. it hurt so bad Kakuzu.. I've never hurt like that before. I couldn't make it feel good no matter what I tried. You know I love the sight of blood, but knowing it was yours... Just... *knowing* without even knowing..."

Kakuzu sat up finally, studying the hunched over figure. Hidan wasn't crying, but damn it all if he didn't seem close to it.

"You.. you make everything okay.. you know? Even when you're mad at me and beating the shit out of me, everything makes sense. When you were gone, I didn't know what to do..." Hidan released his hair and sat up slightly, still slouching heavily. "So.. I turned to Jashin. And I tried to track down that fucking Hyuga again.. Just as something to do you know? And that fucking Pineapple headed fuck was there all alone and I swear.. I was in his room while he was sleeping, I had the fucking razorblade on his throat... it was *right there*. I was going to kill him and move on. And he said my name, in his sleep. He was *dreaming* about me."

Kakuzu's eyes narrowed. Well this confession had just gone sour. He didn't care about how the hell they'd gotten involved, it didn't matter anyway. It was already over with, there was no need to explain. Kakuzu would have moved on as well. It was just life continueing on it's course.

Then why are you angry?

"I don't know. It's all a stupid, long, *stupid* story. He helped things make sense again.. ya know? I didn't feel like I needed to just run around and kill and destroy. Everything was okay, and I mean, the idiot bound himself to Jashin. Was I just supposed to walk away from that? Seriously, he almost kicked your ass, Kuzu."

He looked up, his slight grin vanishing when their eyes met. And he cleared his throat, shifting his vision to the side, looking at nothing in particular. "I... I don't know what else to tell you.. I'm just really confused again. I'm trying really fucking hard here and you're not

giving me anything but the same old bullshit you did back when I first met you. Like, all the progress I've made getting you out of your stupid shell is gone now and it's so fucking *frustrating*. I want to hit you and hug you at the same time."

"Hidan, you're embarrassing yourself."

Suddenly fiery violet eyes locked onto his again and the zealot stood up. "No, I'm not. I'm not fucking afraid to tell you this kind of shit. I know you think it's fucking awkward so you push it away, I did the same damn thing with Pineapple head. I caught myself doing *a lot* of the shit you always do to me, to him. So don't pretend like I don't fucking know what I'm talking about."

"Stop talking about the kid."

"Why? Are you Jealous? Are you admitting that you actually give a shit about me? Because I know you fucking do. I know you went through some seriously messed up shit, but you don't go fucking pushing everyone away because of that, trust me, you just get yourself into a big fucking mess trying to do everything alone. You should be old enough to fucking know that."

Hidan took a step closer, and Kakuzu had to force himself not to jerk away, and hold the zealot's gaze. He didn't want that idiot near him, not when he was all fired up like this...

"You wanna know why I took the duster? Because when I got that for you and talked you into putting it on, you looked at yourself in the mirror, and I came and stood beside you. Do you remember that?"

Kakuzu nodded absently, recalling the day very clearly. He'd pestered him and pestered him like an annoying gnat until the older man had been so desperate to get a moment of peace and quiet that he'd finally yanked it out of Hidan's hands and put it on. Then he'd been forced over to the mirror where the annoying pest had ripped off his mask and stood beside him, absolutely beaming with childlike amazement as he stared at the reflection. Honestly, the black leather

hadn't looked bad, it really complete the 'bounty hunter' look. But it just wasn't him, and besides, it would get torn to shreds in the first serious battle he was in.

"Yeah well.. That was when I realized.. that I loved you..."

Kakuzu's eyes narrowed and he opened his mouth to say something but Hidan cut him off.

"Yeah, I know. Tell me I'm an idiot, hit me, lecture me, whatever. It's not going to change anything. But.. I need to say it now. Because.. that was the worst pain ever, knowing that you died not knowing that. I know you think you're invincible, and I guess you kind of convinced me too. So I didn't think I ever needed to say it out loud. I don't care if you don't feel the same way, and I don't care if you leave me. I said it and you heard it and... well that's fucking that."

He sat back down on the bed, staring down at his pants as he fiddled with a stray thread. Kakuzu stared at him, trying to keep his breathing even. *Dammit Hidan...* The idiot always did this to him. Worked him up to the point where he believed he would never forgive him, where he finally made up his mind to dump the annoying little prick and move on with his life... And then made it impossible to go through with it. Though every bit of logic told him to do it, though his head told him that it wasn't worth the trouble... He just couldn't. Not in all 90 years of his existence had anyone ever caused him this much internal grief.

"Hidan."

A grunt in reply.

"Look at me."

"No."

"Why?"

"Because I know what you're going to do.."

"And what's that?"

"Something that's going to hurt."

Kakuzu sighed and layed back down, propping his head on his hands in the same position he'd been in before. "I thought you liked pain."

"Not that kind of pain.."

"Have it your way then." He sighed, closing his eyes. He really needed to get some sleep, if Hidan wanted to go off on that rant, telling him not to push people away and then refuse to even look at him, fine. He wasn't even going to think about how hypocritical that was, because that was Hidan. He didn't *make* sense, even though he always did.

"Are you still mad?"

"No."

"Good. You're annoying when you're mad."

"And you're annoying when you're alive."

"YOU OLD FUCK!"

"Insufferable idiot."

The squeak of mattress springs sounded just before his own bed rocked suddenly. Within a split second before he was able to open his eyes, a body was on top of him, face buried in the nape of his neck. He blinked, taking in a breath only to realize his heart was racing. Shifting his head, he looked down at a mop of silver hair, absently pulling his arms out from under his head and wrapping them around near trembling shoulders.

"Don't you ever, ever fucking leave me all alone in this shitty world again, seriously. Or I'll come down to hell, drag you back up, and make you wish you were back down there."

"... You think I'll go to hell when I die?"

Hidan lifted his head and smiled. "I know you will, heathen."

Kakuzu rolled his eyes and slid his hand up Hidan's bare back and neck and tangled his fingers in the silky silver locks that he'd missed so much. Yes, he would admit it.

"The reason I managed to escape.." The older man said hesitantly. He cleared his throat before continueing. "All I could think about was.. that I had to live so that I could come home and beat the shit out of you."

Hidan's smile grew bigger, and his eyes laughed along with him. "Awe, Kuzu, how sweet."

"Shut up." He said, pulling the 'younger' man forward until their lips met. The weight on top of him melted into his own body and pale hands traced up his sides and came to a rest on his chest. They pushed enough to give the zealot the leverage to press himself further into the kiss.

Yeah, okay. He definitely missed this. The spark that shot through him, the energy, the rush that no one but the irritating imbecile on top of him could cause. Feeling the pressure of someone on him but unsure of where his body stopped and Hidan's started. Only someone as psychotic and idiotic and impulsive and... and honest and beautiful and loyal as Hidan could fit so perfectly in his embrace.

Damn him.

"So who do you think gets the girl?" Kisame asked, wiggling his eyebrows and picking at his teeth with a toothpick. He was draped

comfortably across the bed watching Itachi brush his hair at the vanity, upside-down.

Damn he looked good. He always did when the Shark-man hadn't seen him in awhile. It didn't help that he'd just witnessed the Uchiha climb on top of a car speeding 100 miles an hour fighting a flying threadmonster.

If that wasn't a turn on then nothing was.

"It's anyone's guess..." He replied in monotone. Kisame made a face in the mirror and their eyes met in the reflection. He stuck his tongue out and dark eyes closed and a soft chuckle escaped his lover. He grinned even wider.

"How can you be in such a good mood after that catastrophe?"

"Bah, we've been through worse. It's just another one of the zombie duo's little marital disputes." He said, sitting back upright. "I bet he get's back with the old miser. They always make up."

"Hn."

Kisame twisted his body to look at the sharingan user. "You don't think so?"

"Shikamaru offers something Kakuzu does not. Two things, considering he was struck through the heart and didn't die." He explained, setting the hairbrush down. "That God of Hidan's is literally his life. Being able to actually share that with someone might outweigh Kakuzu, who isn't truly immortal either. And also, Shikamaru doesn't beat him."

"Are you kidding!?" Kisame laughed, rocking backward. "That's why the little masochist stays with that scrooge!"

Itachi stood up and slinked to the bathroom, strutting a little more than the blue man thought normal. "This is actually a rather serious

ordeal." His voice floated out. "There's two cult members that cannot die running around now. Nagato is not going to just look the other way. Especially not with what Shikamaru is capable of, the fact that he actually uses his brain makes no difference. Get him angry enough and he's no better than Hidan."

The shark-man's small grin disappeared, replaced with a scowl. "You don't think he's gonna make you babysit him too do ya?"

"I don't know. Again, it's anyone's guess. If Hidan and Kakuzu are together then he might have me shadow him long enough to determine if he's going to be a nuisance or not... "

"What if he sticks with the kid?" Kisame asks, letting his eyes absently roam the Uchihas body as he sauntered back in.

"Then I imagine Kakuzu will either leave the akatsuki and dissapear again or be very bad company for awhile."

"I mean, are you still going to have to keep going on these extended vacations?" He said, snatching Itachi by the ass of his pants when he came close and pulling him into his lap. "Because I don't like them."

"I don't particularly enjoy them either.." The raven-haired man replied, melting into his lover without resistance. "I'd rather follow Sasuke around all day long than keep getting dragged into these taxing situations. He's a pain in my ass but at least I know what to expect. I'm going to go prematurely gray dealing with those two."

Kisame gave a dramatic gasp, "Don't speak of such things!" He ran a blue hand through Itachi's loose hair. "He didn't mean it sweeties."

Itachi gave a weary smile and closed his eyes, letting his head fall back onto broad shoulder.

The blue man let his hands stray down over the narrow shoulders, sides, and come to a rest at the not-quite-feminine but still slender

waist of the raven-haired beauty in front of him.

"He's gonna go with the cradle-robber.."

"What has you so convinced?"

"Call it instinct."

"Hn."

"The kid's just a kid. I don't think he's got what it takes to keep the psycho around. Besides, the old bastard is his first love in however many years you said he's been around. You don't just walk calmly away from that." He gave Itachi a small squeeze at the last.

"He did his grieving already though, if you recall. He already went through all the trauma and has begun healing. It wouldn't be logical for him to return to Kakuzu when Shikamaru is immortal as well as a Jashinist. Now more than ever there will always be that question as to whether Kakuzu will return each time he leaves. "

Kisame just hmmm'd and rested his face in the crook of his lovers neck and collarbone.

"And besides, I worked very hard to get those two to stop dancing around each other and just get together. I'm emotionally invested in this." Itachi chuckled the last. "Finding his stupid hideout wasn't easy, and he had all sorts of traps set up, I was actually impressed. Those places are built to last, the fact that he managed to destroy one is a little off-putting."

"Mmm, can we stop talking about them? " Kisame purred, tracing kisses along the pale shoulder, giving a sharkey smile when the Uchiha shivered.

"Well, what have *you* been entertaining yourself with?" He lifted his hand to rest against a falsley gilled cheek and let it wander back and upward until slender fingers twined themselves in coarse navy hair.

"Oh the usual. Sitting there waiting for you to come back, making sappy love songs that I'd never let you hear. And the occasional 'Stop a bank robbery' or 'go subdue this man for questioning' from the boss."

Itachi smiled. "You're so pathetically adorable. What was it Hidan called you? My puppy?"

"Hey! I can stop careing if you prefer." He said, quickly slipping his hands under the back of his lovers thighs and tossing him over his shoulder with ease. The Uchiha made a delightful little squeal of surprise and attempted threat before hitting the mattress and bouncing slightly. He scrambled back into a more dignified position and tossed the hair from his face.

"I'm not a damn doll, don't throw me around."

"Sorry, don't care." The blue man said, turning to crawl on the bed, stalking like a tiger.

"Kisa please, I'm in no mood." The raven hair leaned backward to evade his touch, and he stalked further.

"Well that sounds like a personal problem to me."

"Stop it."

"Nope."

"Kisame. Quit."

"Nuh-uh"

"I'm not fucking kidding you better not."

Growling, The shark man lunged, digging his fingers into Itachi's abdomen and sides and laughing maniacally as the usually stoic man burst into laughter.

"I-hahaa! I'm not a goddamn child- Baahahaa!"

"Stop resisting, you just make it worse."

"I swea-haaahahahaharr Kisame! I'll ki-hehehehehehehill you!"

The shark man hadn't planned on stopping until the bedroom door was suddenly kicked violently open.

"It's three in the fucking morning!" Sasuke growled, glaring between the two. "Will you just hurry up and screw so I can go to sleep!? Gonna have a hangover from hell..." He muttered the last, grabbing the door and whirling, slamming it behind him. His muffled complaints trailed off as he stalked back into his own room, and Kisame finally turned back to his red-faced, glaring lover, grinning like an idiot.

"I hate you."

"You love me."

"But I hate you too."

"Mmm just relax Angel. You're too stressed." Kisame said, holding himself over Itachi, who was currently smoothing his hair. "Stop worrying about everyone else for a second."

"Hn. It would be easier if all my friends weren't immature children."

"That because you're serious enough for all of us."

"Hn."

"Papa Itachi is always there to save our asses."

"Ew. Don't call me that."

Kisame released a throaty growl/chuckle. "Yea it sounds better when *you* call *me* daddy."

"NIGHTMARES!" Came Sasuke's shout, muffled still by the wall between them.

The two pairs of dark eyes met, they exchanged a grin with a wiggle of blue brows, and Itachi's hands shot up. They wrapped themselves around Kisame's neck and pulled him down with a strength that was almost unnatural on such a lithe form.

Sasuke, in his own room, listened for a moment before rolling his eyes and pulling a pair of headphones from his pocket. He shoved them in and flipped out the mp3 player, turning the music on full blast, and collapsed onto the pillow, secretly smiling to himself.

Damn kids.

Unpainted fingernails rapped impatiently on the table where sat the spikey haired Jashinist, alone.

He didn't like this, he wasn't sure why. The thought of meeting with 4 Akatsuki or ex-Akatsuki members in a public place where anyone might overhear their conversation was troublesome.

At least it wasn't a bar this time.

And it didn't help that they were late. Damn this paranoia. He couldn't figure out where it came from.

Actually that was a lie. His pulse was racing and his head was throbbing as it had all night long while he fought a war inside his head. Why the hell had he told Hidan he couldn't stay here? Why the hell did Hidan agreed so easily? He didn't even *try* to argue. He..he *wanted* to go with Kakuzu, like it was no big deal. Sure, they probably had stuff to talk about, but spending the night together? Was it some sort of last screw session before they ended it for good? No.. Hidan wasn't like that.. he was pretty sure. He was an insane, drug-abusing, satal masochist, but a loyal one.

And all this when he'd finally convinced himself that the psycho really cared about him. Fucking hell this was a nightmare.

"The sweetest form of slaughter is the breaking of a heart."

He jerked at the voice, the deep bone chilling whisper that echoed around in his head.

Dammit Jashin, not now.

But.. surely Hidan wouldn't go back. Not after Kakuzu had treated him like that, after he's stared at him with cold, loveless eyes. Kicked him in the face and insulted Jashin, calling him putrid and asenine... He couldn't be dumb enough to delude himself into thinking the old man gave a shit about him after that display. He and Shikamaru... it made so much more sense. Right?

Right?

"Hey kid." A familiar voiced piped from behind him, and he jumped when his hair was touseled. In another second the giant blue man stepped out and swiftly pulled out his chair and sat, giving the man across from him a toothy grin.

"Where's Itachi?" He asked, and immediatly received an eye-roll.

"Sheesh, can't any of you zombies get him off your mind? He *is* spoken for..."

Shikamaru gave him a look and the shark-man clicked his tongue, leaning back and stretching. "Bah, he's outside having a chat with the little bro."

"Sasuke's not going to be here is he?"

"Nah, He's getting rid of him. Just wants to make sure he don't go cause trouble. Why? You got a thing for him too?"

Shikamaru just stared at the man as if he were a weird circus attraction, and Kisame seemed to get a kick out of it, chuckling back behind exposed razorlike teeth.

He really didn't think they knew each other well enough to be teasing each other like this.. and it struck him as relatively odd that someone with the physical outward appearance this man had would be so easy-going and friendly. Then again.. you couldn't really be a timid, self-conscious person to do that to yourself.

"So what's with your..." He paused, unsure how exactly to word the phrase without offending. "Erm.. sharkey-ness."

Nice one.

Again Kisame laughed, and Shikamaru had to admit it was kind of a nice sound. Contagious the way Hidan's was without the slight psychotic chime hidden beneath.

"It's basically a permanent side effect of the jutsu I use. It was imperfect the first time I tried it so the transformation couldn't be completely reversed."

Shikamaru's brows raised, surprised to find himself interested in this topic. And even more surprised to think that Hidan and Kakuzu together hadn't crossed his mind in 5 seconds... well... not counting that.

"You can transform?"

"Yup." Kisame said leaning forward to grab a toothpick from the middle of the table. "Into, you guessed it, a shark. "

"You can become an actual shark?" Holy shit, that's pretty awesome, actually. There were all kinds of jutsu's out there, varying in power and uses. But he'd never heard of anyone actually changing shape. That was a mixture of science and the unexplainable phenomenon that was Jutsu...

"Well, it looks more like some mutant cross... 'Freaky as fuck' is how most people describe it. I don't resort to using it unless I have to, hurts like a bitch."

"So I'm assuming your element is water."

"You would be assuming right." He said, grinning. "Wanna fight sometime?"

"Uh.. I've had enough fighting with you Akatsuki people.."

He tsk'd and pushed the chair back, balancing on two legs. "You say that like you aren't teetering on the verge of joining us. We're not so bad, y'know, If you give it a chance. It's like having a big, freaskishley messed up family."

Shikamaru eyed him sideways, vaguely wondering what the hell was taking the others so fucking long. Not that he wasn't enjoying this lovely bonding time with the half shark man, but he was still concerned about Hidan. If he decided to do something crazy and just skip town with Kakuzu... No .. no he wouldn't do that. Hidan wasn't like Neji, he wouldn't just up and leave him... would he? Surely he had more decency than that...

"What do you mean, teetering on the edge?"

Another shark-tooth grin. "You think we're all just gonna keep this little fiasco a secret? Police got involved, people got injured, you died and came back to life. The boss is gonna hear about it, and he's gonna want an eye kept on you. You wanted in before, I'm pretty sure Dei hasn't forgotten about your victory, and kicking Kakuzu's ass? I don't think there'll be any objections."

Shikamaru processed this. Join the Akatsuki? It was true he'd wanted to before, but only because he'd suspected them of aiding Hidan in murder. And he'd only wanted in because he'd planned on disbanding them by sending them to prison.

Now.. he had a whole new perspective. The Akatsuki were a small world power, stretching their influence far past that small town and helping to keep people with too much power from abusing it. People like Hidan when he'd gone on his rampage.

... This could be a good thing. This could work out perfectly, actually... or turn out to be the biggest mistake of his life...

"Sorry I'm late. Sasuke is being especially headstrong today." Itachi's voice wafted in as he briskly made his way to the table. He plopped into the seat and immediately started studying Shikamaru. The silence seemed to last forever, and Shikamaru shifted uncomfortably under the Uchiha's stare until he finally turned to Kisame lounging beside him.

"Where are Kakuzu and Hidan?"

The shark man just shrugged and continued fiddling with his toothpick. And as if by magic, Hidan's shouting met their ears, causing Shika to turn towards it in both relief and anxiety.

"YOU GOT A FUCKING STARING PROBLEM?! TAKE A GODDAMN PICTURE WHY DON'TCHA!?"

There was a loud thud followed by another string of profanities. Shikamaru turned back around to the two men who suddenly looked exhausted. Kisame rolling his eyes and sighing while Itachi pinched the bridge of his nose, his black nails tapping against the tabletop in annoyance.

The bell clinked as the diner door slammed open, causing Shikamaru to twist back around, and in sauntered Kakuzu. He briefly scanned the area before his multicolored eyes met Shikamaru. They paused there for a moment before shifting to focus on Itachi, and gave a small nod before coming in further. Not two seconds after he sauntered in Hidan nearly came crashing through the door, wiping blood from under his nose. His eyes alighted on the Nara's as well,

but the false smile that sprouted from it was like a knife through the chest. Yeah, he actually *did* know what that felt like.

Oh no.. he knew without knowing at all. Something happened between the two, they'd at the very least made up. *Oh Jashin please let that be all. They're just staying friends.*

"Fucking old miser." He muttered, coming to pull out a chair beside Shikamaru instead of Kakuzu. His heart fluttered, perhaps he was just being paranoid. "Didn't do anything but defend him. Fucking pricks always staring.." Shikamaru took a moment to glance quickly at the older man, thanking Jashin that Kakuzu didn't catch him.

Then he nearly did a double take. That trenchcoat.. he would swear on his life it was the same one Hidan had been wearing when he'd first seen him... But he'd discarded it in that little clearing. Which meant he went back and got it.

It was Kakuzu's...? That just made his stomach churn even worse. Hidan had even been wearing the man's clothes the day he almost died, almost like a slap to the face to remind him not to get himself killed...

"Sorry we're late. Hidan seemed to forget that time is money." Kakuzu finally said, tearing him from his thoughts but not freeing him from the sinking feeling in his chest.

"Tch, I was gonna get up and meet you here, I just didn't wanna get up at the asscrack of dawn."

"We would not be late if you had gotten up when I told you the first time."

"Well maybe if your stupid money-grubbing ass wouldn't have gotten such a cheap fucking hotel all the way across the city-"

"It's fine." Itachi interrupted sharply. "We're all here now. It's fine." He repeated, sounding like he was close to losing it.

Hidan huffed and sulked for a total of two seconds, and then perched his chin on laced fingers, lifting a brow and smirking at Shikamaru. "So how was your night without me Pineapple head?"

Shut up Hidan. "Well.. I wouldn't know. I was asleep."

"Bah, okay smartass. You keep acting all calm." He said, then suddenly becoming very serious and leaning in closer. "I can practically taste your jealousy."

Bastard. It wasn't realistic of him not to expect Hidan to tease him, but this was borderline being cruel. Something was definitely off, Hidan was acting normal enough, but at the same time being completely different. *No.. nonono. Don't even think about it. Stop over-analyzing. Blood bond, remember?*

"Alright, so I think me and Kakuzu here are the only ones who don't really know what's going on. So spill the beans kid." Kisame said, curling his finger toward him repeatedly and leaning forward.

Shikamaru hesitated. He had expected an explanation, and had been prepared to give one, but his nerves betrayed him. And for once in his life he drew a complete blank. "Uhhh..."

"Shikamaru and Hidan developed a relationship," Itachi said calmly for him. "And I think it's been put very clearly forward that you've accepted Jashinism as your faith. This variable alone has caused a sort of domino effect."

Er.. yeah. Thanks Itachi, blunt as usual. The Nara nodded and cleared his throat, remembering everything now that he'd been given the jump start.

"Uh, yeah. Well I'm guessing what you all want to know is why I'm sitting here right now instead of laying dead in that field." He paused to gauge reactions. And unanimously everyone nodded, except Kakuzu, who sat statuesque in his place in between Shikamaru and Itachi, an empty chair on either side of him.

"Uh.. well. To put it most basically, Hidan and I kind of accidentally made what's called a Blood bond, by, er, ingesting each others blood within the circle during a ritual offering... "

Kisame made a disgusted face and sat back into his chair, quietly disengaging from the conversation but remaining mercifully silent.

"It's kind of a loophole for Jashinists to continue becoming more powerful, see, anyone who does this sort of thing ends up leeching each others abilities. And most normally one person or the other becomes an unwilling sacrifice. Which leaves the live one with their powers, and moves them up the chain of command as well as boosts their power and therefore ability to provide Jashin with souls."

Wow... it made so much sense to him, but trying to explain it out loud... well he felt like a psycho. Everyone except Hidan seemed to just be waiting for him to hurry up and finish explaining. They had no interest in the matter. Hidan however was staring wide-eyed and slightly slackjawed like a toddler being told war stories by his grandparent.

"But uh.. you can probably guess where the little snag is in here. Hidan can't be killed. And now that I've sort of inherited some of his immortality, neither can I. As long as we keep providing Jashin with souls... that is." Everyone was silent as he looked around nervously. And to his surprise, it was Kakuzu who asked the first question.

"So the key to immortality is nothing more than tasting Hidan's blood, and vice-versa, while performing a ritual."

"Erm.. Well. I mean you can't just do it with anyone. You have to, ah... *care deeply* about them." He cleared his throat. "Jashin being the God of slaughter and all. The worst-or.. *best* in this case-kind of murder is homicide of the heart. In other words, offering him the soul of someone you... love.. is one of the greatest things you can do for him."

Of course he had to confess his feelings about Hidan to Kakuzu, right to his face, with the whole world watching.

Seriously Jashin. Kill me.

He was studied with unreadable green and red eyes before the lids shut slowly and the older man shook his mask-covered face. "It looks like they managed to figure it out just by taking me out of the situation." His eyes re-opened and focused again on Shikamaru, his voice dropping an octave as he continued. "Good thing I killed all those who would have sought you out for it. It seems you owe me, boy."

"Ah shut up." Hidan piped, waving his hand at him. "He's full of shit Pineapple head, don't let him trick you."

The creepy eyes locked onto Hidan and sent a glare across the table that nearly felt as if the surface might burst into flames. The zealot was unaffected, taunting the older man right back.

"I agree with what Kakuzu is saying. This is not something that would benefit you two to have the public knowing about. So aside from the report I'll be sending to Nagato, no one says another word on the subject. Agreed?"

Again there was simultaneous nods around the table. Kisame seemed overjoyed at the fact.

"Now, onto the next topic. Kakuzu, you will be returning as the treasurer of the Akatsuki correct?"

"Yes." Was the short reply.

"Good. Glad to have you back, Sasori tries very hard but it's not his fortè. Hidan, will you be returning from your hiatus as well?"

The albino put his hands behind his head and leaned back, eyes narrowed and chewing the inside of his cheek in thought. "Do I get a

welcome back party?"

"You get a slap across the face for causing so much chaos." Itachi said in an almost joking manner. "You will do nothing but give your report and resume doing what you did before."

"Tch. I think I earned a few days off..."

"You've taken a year off you idiot." Kakuzu growled. "I would like to get started rebuilding my life, if you don't mind. So stop dodging the question."

Hidan stuck his tongue out, and for whatever reason, Shikamaru had to focus very hard not to laugh at such a childish act. "Yeah whatever. S'not like I can fuckin' just leave now that the hardass is back on the job."

"Very well." Itachi said. "Kisame will inform Nagato while I finish things up in the city."

Shikamaru was just about to sigh in relief when Itachi continued on.

"There is one more rather important topic to discuss. One that I would like the three of your opinions on before bringing it up with Nagato."

Violet, black, and Christmas eyes landed on the Uchiha. Kisame chuckled and raised his brows at Shikamaru, grinning. And his stomach sank. He was serious about that? Itachi actually wanted him to join? What happened to being a niece thorn in his side?

"I think, under the unique circumstances, that having Shikamaru among us would be something to consider thoroughly." The sharingan user paused, waiting for reactions but not receiving any. "He has already had his initial orientation two years ago, and I think everyone agrees that he has more than improved since. It would not be difficult to induct him in."

"And why does it strike you as a good idea to have two of these in our care?" Kakuzu asks, gesturing to the two Jashinists. "It's difficult enough keeping just one under control. And I refuse right now to be held responsible for any idiotic stunts they pull."

"First of all, there's the extensive knowledge Shikamaru has on our organization." Itachi said, calm but for a slight annoyed tick at the edge of a perfect brow. Shikamaru didn't react to this, though he thought it might be stretching the truth, or Maybe itachi thought he knew more than he did. He certainly wouldn't call it *extensive* knowledge.

"As well as the fact that he and Hidan could now present an even bigger threat when partnered together, sharing abilities as they do, they would be a flawless team. Third, Nagato is going to want an eye kept on him. No offense Shikamaru, but you cause twice the damage Hidan does while being only half as angry."

Shikamaru just nodded absently, his gaze flicking around, unfocused as he tried to process all of this. And further personal reasons would be the fact that he would have a job, seeing as he was most likely going to lose the one he had at the firm. And with whoever this 'Nagato' fellow was's blessing, it would be a good way for him to weed out potential sacrifices. Surely he would agree if Shikamaru promised to help tend to Hidan and keep him from doing stupid things. Hell, they could do it together and kill two birds with one stone, literally.

Hidan could continue teaching him, and they could be together. So what if Kakuzu would be there on a daily basis? He probably wouldn't be around. He was always gone for long periods of time before, surely he would go back to doing what he had before this whole mess had occurred. He would help Hidan get over it. Everything could work out..

Or was he just desperate to believe it?

"I strongly believe he would be an asset." Itachi concluded, studying everyone in turn.

"Yeah, and plus if you steal Hidan from him he might go all aggro again and then he'd be our enemy. We could probably all take him but.. well hey I'm not the only one kinda scared of him am I? We all stared like horny schoolgirls while he fucked Kakuzu's world up." Kisame said casually. The awkward silence that followed was near suffocating. In the absence of words, and with nothing more than a nervous glance from Hidan, his fears had been confirmed.

And Shikamaru's heart shattered... again.

He stood up abruptly, swallowing heavily. "Let me know what your boss thinks." He said, already having made up his mind but unable to process enough thought on the subject to decline the invitation. There was no way in hell he could be on a team with Hidan and not be *with* him. And he'd rather die than share him with that money-grubbing bastard. Then again, he should have expected it. It wasn't as if he could expect the same from Hidan, and they were already in. Once you were in Akatsuki, you never got out.

So the only logical decision was for him to stay the hell out and let them be.

Part of him didn't even want to tell Hidan about the requirements of their blood bond. He honestly wouldn't even mind dying. After everything he'd done for Neji and Hidan alike, he was *still* getting fucked over.

But the other half of him knew that Hidan would die. And even with the wrath and agony the albino was causing him right now, he didn't want that.

"Shikamaru.." Itachi protested.

The Nara just mustered up all his self control and smiled, pulling the ring from his pocket and holding it up to where Itachi could see. "I'll

be in touch."

And then, without knowing how the hell he did it, he activated his jutsu without the word or the handsign, forcing life into his shadow now bubbling around his feet like a miniature tar pit, and stiffened as his body was quickly swallowed up in it.

Thank you Jashin.

A/N-

Alriiiiiight.

Yeah... I hate me too right now. But C'mon guys. They can't live happily ever after. If I let them do that then there would be no way I could continue it on into a trilogy.

Which I've decided to do. :)

Yeah, see? You can't hate me.

ANYWAYS! I think I have diabetes now from writing that random fluffy Kisaita moment. YOU'RE WELCOME FLUFFY! Apparently what I wrote before wasn't enough for her. So here, tooth-rotting, tickletastic, Kisalta fluff. I only made them this ooc because technically in this story, Sasuke and Itachi are on good terms, which makes both of the brothers lives inherently better, which makes them both less... Uchiha-ish.

And also KakuHida fuff, which I've reminded myself that I'm much better at than any other pairing. xD

SO! Next chapter is the last. Even though it's not, what with the epilogue and bonus chappie.

Forgive the typos, blahblahblah, I love you and REVIEWWWW!

Not quite goodbye

Recurring Nightmares

It was an amazing feeling, traveling this way. It was no wonder Itachi did it.

Absolutley indescribable, was how it felt. Like he was seperate from his body, like a bolt of electricity traveling through a wire. Except he wasn't in a tunnel, he was free to go and move wherever he wanted. How he'd managed to do it at all was still a mystery. It was bordering on just plain freaky that he kept spontaneously learning new Jutsu, but at least this one was handy.

The victorious moment was broken by the unbearable pain of heartbreak. Overwhelming and miserable in a way he didn't remember it feeling the first time. When Neji had left, he'd been numb. But this... this was torture. This was murder. He would give anything just to feel that numbness again, to feel the simple aching loneliness instead of this roaring agony. It was too much, it was far too much. And maybe half of it was even caused by this unfamiliar jutsu. His chakra was draining from it at a rate that was near painful.

That didn't even matter though. He was broken *again*. He had done everything he possibly could have and received nothing but utter bullshit in return. He should have known, he should have expected it. And actually, he had. He knew from the beginning that it wasn't meant to last. Dammit, why hadn't he listened? Why hadn't he just fucking gotten rid of Hidan and gone on with his life? Even though.. in retrospect, Kakuzu may or may not have come looking for him. So in a way keeping Hidan alive had done the same for him...

It didn't matter now. He hadn't listened to his head and now his heart was paying the dues. How could he have ever fooled himself into believeing that the psycho had actually cared about him? Everything he did, all the shit he went through... It didn't make sense that it

wasn't real. Hidan had told him secrets that no one else knew. Things only another Jashinist would understand. Every single sign had pointed in the direction of love. He'd battled with himself for so long, and then when he gave in... well... He knew now that he'd been wrong. If Hidan could choose that man over him then it really had been nothing more than lust. Shikamaru had been a replacement, flung aside when the original was brought back into the picture.

He squeezed his eyes shut, or would if he wasn't just a bodiless spirit moving through the world with unmatched speed. There was no way he could be expected to handle this. He was dying. Dying in the place that no one could reach, that no amount of medication or rest or therapy could ever fix. He'd thought he'd died before. Fuck, he wanted to go back in time and beat the shit out of himself. That was nothing compared to this. Holy shit it hurt so bad...

I just want to go home. He thought, picturing his bed in his mind. And with nothing more than that he was suddenly thrown back into a physical state, grunting in surprise when he fell from the air, bounced off the mattress and crashed to the floor.

He stayed in that position for awhile, his body flexed as wave after wave of nausea washed over him and the world rocked and twisted. He stared down at the floor, wide-eyed with the inner pain and outer turmoil that Hidan and the new Jutsu had caused. *Oh yes, why thank you life. Thanks for giving me lemons that keep turning up poisoned.*

"Well... I'll have to work on that.." He moaned into the carpet when it finally started to dull. Apparently leaving your body like that had a few side effects, but at least he had arrived in one piece... if that was even a good thing.. His mind vaguely wondered if this was a small dose of what Kisame felt when he transformed, and then the other half wondered why the fucking hell he was thinking of the Jolly Blue Giant at a time like this. He couldn't even be psyched that he had more or less just learned to teleport. So what? Why be happy? Here he was again, alone in his apartment with a freshly broken heart.

Groaning, he pushed himself up into a standing position only to fall backward back onto the bed. He covered his face with both hands, inhaling deeply through his nose. He didn't even feel like crying. It hurt too much to cry. And it was a pointless action anyway, never helped before. That felt like the only damn thing he'd done after Neji left. Never when he was awake, but in every single nightmare, and every damn time he woke up in a cold sweat there were tears. Always tears. It was pathetic, running to his bedroom and collapsing on the bed so he could cry without interruption...

And besides, Jashin wouldn't approve.

BAHH! Jashin? Who cares about Jashin? Who cared about anything!? He was all fucking alone in the world and now he couldn't even die!

The thought slammed into him with such force that he whimpered. Forever... all alone... No.. no this wasn't fair. IT WASN'T FAIR!

He shot up, eyes wide and panting. His gaze fell on his alarm clock and without thinking he grabbed it and ripped it right from it's cord, chucking it into the wall with all his might. The machine crashed and broke into pieces, and cracks spiderwebbed across the drywall.

It wasn't enough, he needed something else to break. He had to make everything on the outside even with his innards. The whole world needed to feel what he felt right now. Time needed to stop, people needed to pay attention. Because this is what happens when you're ignorant. This is what happens when you act based on how you feel and not what you're thinking. You became devoted to a Demon God, You fell in love with a psychotic satal masochist, you gave your soul to save your ex who left you high and dry and keep him from killing the man who replaced him, only for him to go and do the exact same fucking thing...

He grabbed the bedside lamp, repeating the action. Then picked up the entire nightstand and sent it crashing through the window. He didn't care if he injured someone, He didn't care if they called the

police. What the hell could they do to him? Put him in jail? Sentence him to death?

He screamed at that, raw and animalistic and grabbed his mattress, flipping it one-handed from the bed and then leaping over it to move himself to the livingroom. That god-aweful room where it all started, where all the memories were. He would destroy every last inch of it.

How could this happen again? How could he *let it*? How had it come to this?

Jashin you're twisted and cruel and I hate you!

Doomed forever to wander the earth, alone, unable to die, forced to kill others and not only that, but now after all of this he would still have to see Hidan twice a year. He had to give the bastard his blood so that he wouldn't die.

Why, *WHY* did he care whether the zealot survived or not? After he'd built Shikamaru up and repaired him and made him feel alive again, He'd dropped him just like that. So easily without a second thought, like it wasn't even a contest. Like nothing they had done together mattered. Like all the passion in every touch had just been some dream that could be forgotten when you woke up.

And of all the people to ditch him for, it had to be that fucking heathen asshole that didn't even appreciate him. How could he choose him!? How could.. how... just *HOW!*? *WHY!*?

Another scream tore from his throat as he tore the back from his easy chair, swinging it into the wall three times before just throwing it at the crumbling sheetrock. And when his eyes lighted on the couch, the anger flared up even further. His vision blurred and his eyes stung as he stomped to the kitchen and ripped a big kitchen knife from the holder. That stupid couch, He'd rip it to shreds. That place where Hidan had held him all night long, where he'd finally given in and accepted Jashin and Hidan both...

He stormed back out and lifted the blade, slamming it down and sneering to himself when it went cleanly through the fabric. He pulled downward, giggling maniacally at the harsh ripping sound. He pulled it free and slashed again, working out his frustration over and over with each swipe and cut.

Tricked into bring a Jashinist, tricked into hating Neji, tricked into falling for Hidan, tricked into giving up his mortality.

Is that the game you're playing Hidan? Break my heart because you can't kill me?

This was slaughter. It felt like slaughter. Like he was dying without actually dying. And he'd let it happen, walked willingly right into the trap, oblivious and yet knowing what it was the entire time.

Well you're an idiot. Pain only fueled him, anger gave him power. When he was mad he could do *anything*. Jashin forbid Hidan show up right now, because he *would* kill him. And then he'd go finish off Kakuzu too. He only had two more hearts, unless he'd stayed up all night long restocking, assuming that's what he did.

Yeah, he'd kill them both. And then... and then what? Then he'd *really* be alone. Then he'd have to live with himself... Forever.

He cried out again, trying his best not to let it turn to sobs as he fell to his knees and dug the blade into the material over and over, each stab backed with less and less power.

Wetness settled on his cheeks, and he clenched his eyes shut. He'd cried anyway, like a little girl. *Damn you Hidan.* How could he do this to him.. how could he make him cry? He was different, he wasn't Neji. They hadn't been together but a few weeks, and yet it hurt so much more. It wasn't possible, but then again, a lot of the things he'd witnessed weren't possible. A lot of the things he'd done himself, spontaneously without any prior teaching.

Grinding his teeth, he stopped his attack on the loveseat, cracking his lids to stare down at the destroyed peice of furniture. The tears fell down and absorbed themselves into the fabric, silent but for the small drip of hitting the material.

Jashin... It made no sense. He'd been so sure, the Slaughter God had been so confident. There was no possible way that the Almighty frikin' Jashin didn't know that Kakuzu was still alive, held prisoner by his own followers.

What was the point? There was none. Maybe he just wanted to watch Shikamaru writhe and thrash in pain after putting Hidan in the ground. All of this, all this utter bullshit, could not have been part of some convolouted plan to get Neji...

"A soldier will not stop until someone is either converted, or dead." The deep voice whispered, chilling him to the core. No... all this was because of *him*? That one stupid day when Hidan had tested him? He'd said he'd make "A BAMF Jashinist." And.. and he was right! But, how could he have known? Surely that idiot hadn't planned all this out. Surely he couldn't have just been laying in wait for the right moment...

Unless it was just Jashin himself. He'd seen the potential and set his eyes on the goal. And in the end got what he wanted.

' Jashin is scary clever. Even more than you.. '

Son of a bitch. Son of a dirty goddamned bitch. It was, the whole fucking thing was a battle of wits, with so many twists and turns and random situations and curveballs thrown in that there would have been no possible way for Shikamaru to dodge it. He'd.. he'd practically been showing off! *Look how much smarter I am, look at my power. Don't you want it?*

Maybe somewhere in there he'd wanted to get Neji too, collect his dept and settle everything. But in the process he had gotten

Shikamaru's eternal loyalty. Bloody hell no wonder he'd been smiling and laughing so much!

I'M SUCH AN IDIOT!

He made no reaction when he felt the slight pull on his mind. He could remember that pull, the distant tugging, like Jashin wanted him to go somewhere and do something. Last time it had been when he needed to find Hidan. And somehow just at the thought of the man he knew it was him. He must have followed him.. He had all his abilities after all. Maybe all he had to do was see him use them. Or hell, maybe he just made shit up, seeing as that's what Shikamaru had done.

And only slumped further when the window slid open and two feet thunked to the ground.

"Go away." He croaked, ashamed at the lack of command in his voice. He sounded just as broken as he felt.

"Pineapple head... I'm not just gonna dump you like the princess.." Hidan's uncharacteristically soft voice said. "But you gotta understand. Or maybe you don't, I don't fuckin' know. But I'm not leaving until you let me explain."

Shikamaru forced out a sarcastic laugh, pushing himself to his feet and whirling to face Hidan. "There's nothing to explain. I get it. I really do. It was all a trap wasn't it? I knew from the start how wrong this was, how wrong we were. I should have realized right away that it was just you trying to keep that fucking God of yours happy. But I fucking... I just.. I let it happen anyway. I fucked *myself* over."

"There's nothing wrong about it. If anything, me and Kakuzu is what's wrong..." Hidan said, taking a step closer and shocking the hell out of the younger Jashinist. He stared at him in utter confusion. Dammit Hidan YOU DON'T MAKE SENSE!

"I know... how you feel. But you have to understand, I've been here a *lot* longer than you. I was alone for most of that fucking time. When I finally found Jashin, I begged him.. like a pathetic little worm, for someone to be with. Anyone that wouldn't die in 40 or 80 or 100 years. I.. I paid my dues Pineapple head. I know it sounds selfish but Kakuzu is the one and only, he was here first. Jashin brought him into my life, I *asked* for him. I can't just turn away a gift like that. I couldn't if I wanted to. And unless *he* wants to end it, I don't want to. I can't... even with you, it's not the same."

"He treats you like shit.." Shikamaru said wearily, "And.. I'm here too. He brought me here right? When you thought Kakuzu died you wanted someone else. And here I am. You can't turn me down either!" His voice cracked at the end and fresh tears welled up. He cursed himself for doing this in front of Hidan, but on the other hand, he didn't really fucking care.

"Yeah, but I'm a psycho remember? And even so I can't fucking.. I can't just leave the Akatsuki. I've tried before. And I can't see him every day and just... be okay. You, you were also a project, no offense. You're a Jashinist, an immortal. You can stand on your own two feet. I'm sure he'll give you someone too, he has that kind of power, if you haven't realized by now."

What if I want you...? "What if.." He stopped himself before voicing this thought. It was obvious that the zealot wasn't going to budge. He'd chosen Kakuzu, end of story. And even though it hurt, even though Shikamaru desperately wanted to *annihilate* the old fucker, he had to respect that. Jashin had brought Kakuzu back into Hidan's life, knowing who he would choose. Now was Shikamaru's turn to walk in the silver-hair's shoes for a few millenia. And Hey, at least the psycho had the decency to come explain, unlike Neji. "What if.. he really does die?"

Hidan flinched at this, but recovered a second later and closed the distance between them. Shika turned his head but didn't resist the arms that wrapped around him. "Look, I'm not good at this touchy-feely shit. But you're not going anywhere and neither am I. So.. just

cheer the fuck up alright? It's not forever. You got a long fucking time left to do whatever the hell you want. One thing you gotta learn about this immortality bullshit is that there's no time-limit. On *anything*... "

Shikamaru sighed, stepping away and meeting the violet eyes of the man silently killing him. Walking around, aimlessly killing to provide Jashin with souls. Unending power, but no purpose to use it on. How... how could he be expected to do that? "I think that's scarier than death... "

"You get used to it. I'd say sorry for getting you into this but I'm not." The albino replied, his signature grin back in its rightful place. "You just gotta go a little crazy, try a few drugs. Every three or four decades they come out with some pretty awesome shit. Jashin will take care of the rest."

Shikamaru smiled at this despite himself. Yeah.. go a little crazy, try a few drugs... sounded like a 70's song. But.. Hidan was the only immortal, it's not like he could go get a second opinion. He honestly didn't see himself doing drugs just to pass the time, but honestly, he didn't know much of anything anymore. He had done *a lot* of things in the past few weeks that he'd never seen himself doing.

Jashin will take care of the rest... Indeed he would, Hidan. You had no idea how well he'd taken care of everything. He took in another deep breath. Might as well just tell him, at least there was that small comfort. It wasn't goodbye. Just... see you later.

"Speaking of it. Don't go after Neji anymore. He's out of the deal."

Hidan eyed him, raising a silver brow in question.

"It's on me now." He said, forcing a smirk and then smiling for real at the man's continued stare of confusion. Damn.. he was going to miss this. It brought the dull ache he'd all but forgotten about, and he resisted the tears that threatened to pool in his eyes with all his might. "I made a deal with Jashin. My soul for Neji's, but seeing as

you can't kill me and he prefers my soul stay in this body, it's basically just a really big blood offering."

Hidan laughed. He actually laughed and punched Shikamaru on the shoulder. "See Pineapple head? Told'ja he had a plan for you." Shikamaru almost laughed at that himself. Well damn, he really *did* have a plan all along, didn't he? The spikey haired Jashinist would be surprised if he'd had fucking schematics, planning every single last detail..

"So what, I get to finally stab you through the heart or what?"

The Nara continued smiling despite himself. "Twice a year. It goes like a normal sacrifice. I just get to walk away from it. And don't forget, or the deal is off and he revokes his gift. Then we both die."

Hidan sighed dramatically and ran a hand through his hair. "You little shit. So I gotta hunt you down and kill you every six goddam months?"

"Yeah," He said, smirking. "You didn't think I'd just let you run off with that old fuck did you?"

Again the zealot chuckled. "Damn. Everybody wants a peice of me, such is the burden of Jashin's love." He finished in a preacher's tone. "You ain't gonna make it easy either huh?"

"Nope."

"Well," Hidan said, maneuvering the knife Shikamaru forgot he was still holding from his hand and spinning it in his open palm for a few seconds. Then he caught it, holding it threateningly toward the Jashinist facing him. "Fucking game on then." He slid the blade across his tounge and tossed it aside, stepping forward again before Shikamaru had time to react. He was grabbed and leaned backward bridal style before those wicked lips pressed themselves into his and a bleeding tongue dove into his mouth.

You psycho son of a bitch. He thought, closing his eyes and letting the taste soak into him. *That's okay though. One more wouldn't hurt anything...* He lifted his hand and let his fingers slide through the gelled hair before grasping a handful and yanking lightly. The mouth on his growled and kissed him deeper. He pushed back, he was going to miss this too. The random, unexpected romance. The rough but gentle embracing. The euphoria, the ecstasy, the tantalizing sweet but sour taste of Hidan's blood.. Their auras melding together into one insane, immortal, Jashin obsessed spirit... It was so beautifully disturbing. So horribly wrong that it successfully reached perfection.

All too soon the moment ended and Hidan pulled away, hoisting the fellow Jashinist back to a standing position. He took a step back, licking the red smear around his mouth and eyeing Shika with fiery, lust-filled eyes. And with a small nod and the blink of an eye he was out the window and gone from the Nara's life.

At least for now.

Shikamaru repeated him, slowly running his tongue in a circle around the edges of his mouth, then wiping away the excess.

He could live with this... he thought. It wasn't really as bad as he'd made it seem. The psycho of a man hadn't been using him, but he'd been put in a position that there was no way to escape from without causing pain. He'd taken the easier, more familiar path, as any normal person would, and in the end it worked out more-or-less anyway. This was Jashin's plan, he had taken care of him this far, he had taken care of them both. Maybe he really wasn't so evil, just... brutally forward. He did what it took to get things done, and had somehow managed to spare all important parties in the process. Shikamaru really, *really* needed to stop doubting him.

Sure.. he would see Hidan again. And maybe by then he would come to his senses and realize that Kakuzu was a selfish ass. And maybe not, maybe it would take longer. And that was okay, he had time, he had all the time in the world now. Twice a year for eternity...

he could live with it. Yeah... yeah he could. Once again he'd pulled it off. Saved Neji, Hidan, and even himself.

And speaking of Neji, he needed to be informed of the situation. If he tried going after Hidan again, he would inevitably get himself killed. Kakuzu was back to pull the idiot albino out of any grave he found himself in, and though Neji was far from stupid, there was no way he could claim victory.

He looked around the room, grimacing. First things first, he needed to pack his shit, because this apartment was officially fucked. Being the accursedly kind person he was, he could at the least leave some money for the complex manager to repair the damage he and his 'friends' had caused.

Then, he needed to quit his job if it wasn't already gone. Working in law enforcement would be handy for helping him weed out the bad guys he needed, but he was a terrible liar. And deceiving them would be an unnecessary weight on his shoulders. Besides, he hated pushing paper anyway. Hunting the people down himself was a much more exciting prospect. And it didn't even bother him to realize he was eager to commit his first murder. After all, you *had* to go a little crazy...

Gathering his resolve, he headed toward the warzone of a bedroom to pack the necessities.

Shikamaru Nara was going rogue.

And it wasn't a drag at all.

"Hey."

"Shit!" The brunette squealed, jumping and whirling around. The look on his face was so priceless. Pale blue eyes the size of saucers, he looked like he'd been caught stealing cookies from the jar.

"Wha.. what are you doing here!?" He said breathlessly, smoothing back his hair and standing back into a more dignified position. "God Shikamaru you.. you nearly gave me a heart attack.." He sputtered out, making the Nara crack a smile from his perch in the open window.

Tracking down the Hyuga had been a bit of a tedious task, but he'd done it, and it only took two days.

Neji had set up his residence in a smaller town some couple hundred miles from the city. Not as small as the one they'd lived in together, but a comfortable size. Luckily for him Sasuke had been in a reluctantly talkative mood. Shikamaru had started his search with the younger Uchiha, remembering Itachi's mention of having Sasuke tail Neji. It had only taken a few threats before the man stopped being a smartass and hesitantly gave him the name of the town.

And from there on it was a matter of getting there, breaking into the county treasurer's records and looking up Neji's tag number on the car he had rightfully assumed the brunette purchased. After all, Neji Hyuga wasn't one to go bounding over rooftops to get to work, which was another thing the Nara assumed correctly. Seeing as the byakugan user didn't have a sugar-daddy anymore, of course he would get a job.

He stepped down into the second story apartment, and was taken wholly off guard when the lithe body crashed into him and wrapped their arms around his torso.

"You're alive! Oh thank God Shikamaru you have no idea. I didn't know what to do, you told me to leave but I... I.. I don't know! I was so scared I killed you, I could hardly live with myself. I kept going to the hospital but they said they'd never even heard of you and I went to your apartment but the door was locked and I couldn't find your car-"

"Whoa, hey slow down a sec." He interrupted, prying the teary-eyed man off him. Damn, he'd forgotten completely about that incident

after everything else that went down. He held the brunette at arms length, trying not to let his amusement show. "Yeah. I'm alive. Long story. Anyway I just came to let you know I fixed the whole Hidan-trying-to sacrifice-you thing."

Neji's eyes widened further, if that was possible. "You killed him?" He said in wonder.

"No." He said, cutting him off from the thought immediately. "But I fixed it. No one else will be after you or any of your family anymore. The curse has been lifted."

Perfect brows creased in disbelief and amazement. "Shikamaru... how.."

"Ahah," He interrupted once more, putting a finger on soft, full lips, seeing a flicker of irritation cross the Hyugas features. "Loooong story, seriously. Don't make me explain."

At this Neji's demeanor changed and he jerked away as if Shikamaru had some sort of deadly, contagious disease. He stared quizzically at suddenly scrutinizing, suspicious eyes.

"Why are you acting so... unlike yourself?" He said, taking another step back. His voice sharpened in anger as he continued. "I thought you were dead and now you just come hopping through my window like a fucking monkey acting all calm and casual. What's gotten into you?"

"That's a good question." Shikamaru replied sharply, counting to ten in his head. He'd forgotten about how erratic Neji's emotions could be when under stress. And really, he wasn't calm, collected Shikamaru Nara anymore. He was half-Hidan now. And bad things happened when you pissed him off. "If I tell you, will you promise not to go throwing yourself in any more deadly peril?"

"Don't talk to me like that Shikamaru Nara! I did what I had to do."

"Okay, whatever. Damn." He said, rolling his eyes. This wasn't the kind of conversation he'd predicted... but it's not as if anything he planned ever worked out anymore. "Look. I made a deal with Jashin and took the curse onto myself. Don't worry about it though because it turns out I'm immortal thanks to Hidan. So.. you're free, you're welcome, don't do anything stupid."

He turned on heel to hop back out the window, but a hand latched onto him and pulled him back around. He growled under his breath.

"Wait! You're *immortal* ? When the hell.. what.. Shikamaru WHAT THE HELL!?"

He sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. Dammit, he didn't want to sit here and calmly discuss this. It wasn't as if he had anywhere to go or anything to do, but he was more than eager to put the past behind him. Seeing Neji wasn't as easy as he'd thought it would be. Yes, he'd more or less successfully moved on. But no matter how the Hyuga looked, he was still beautiful. Like a fucking succubus, he literally *could not* look bad.

"Yeah.." He surrendered, giving the brunette a weary smile. "I didn't mean to do it, but it worked out in the end."

"How in the *fuck*, did you *accidentally* make yourself *immortal* ?" Neji countered incredulously.

"I already had to explain this once..." He mumbled, rolling his eyes when the Hyuga didn't budge. "Okay. So Jashinists can do this kind of ritual where they sort of connect themselves with each other spiritually, and through that they gain all the other persons abilities. And.. well that's what happened. So... Yeah I halfway stole Hidan's 'gift'." he mimed quotations with his fingers.

"How.. how do you know for sure?"

"Trust me.. I can't die." He breathed, memories of being pierced through the heart by living thread tendrils invading his mind. Ugh...

so gross. How the hell Hidan was attracted to *that* was a mystery that would never be solved.

"Okay well... Where's the psycho?" Neji said, obviously trying to process everything and fill in the blanks. Shikamaru relaxed at the change of subject. He had no problem explaining the recent breakup.

"Kakuzu came home finally. They got back together." He watched the mixture of joy and pity wash across his old lovers face. Then continued on when realization shimmered in his eyes.

"I'm... going off the grid for awhile. Neji, this visit really was only to let you know you're safe... nothing more."

"Yeah... I know." He said softly, and it was Shikamaru's turn to look confused.

"I wouldn't expect that of you. We ended things, you moved on, and I'm working on it. But that doesn't mean I hate you or anything. Life.. just got in the way. It happens, it's not anyones fault."

Shikamaru smiled at this. The slate between them had been officially wiped clean. No more finger-pointing, no more nightmares... Shikamaru's world was once again at peace. Or.. as peaceful as it would get being the undying servant of a god that ate souls and encouraged murder.

"I'm..sorry. About you and the psy-erm.. and Hidan." Neji said, wringing his hands. And the Jashinist couldn't help the laugh that escaped him.

"No you're not. But thank you. It's fine. I get to beat the shit out of him every so often still. He's gotta try to sacrifice me in place of your family. So... it's okay."

Neji offered a nervous chuckle as well, obviously trying to hold back the flood of questions that confession had brought. "Well.. good luck

with that." He said, then stepping forward and wrapping himself once again around Shikamaru. "Thank you though, it's great to hear I'm not going to be murdered in my sleep. Maybe now I can actually get some."

Shikamaru returned the embrace, it felt like a hug among friends. Strange, but not bad. Perfect, that's what he wanted. No hard feelings, no lingering hatred. No more anger, no more pain. Just... just happily ever after.

"Yeah..." He muttered into the chocolate hair. "No problem."

Neji backed away, sighing. "Goodbye again?"

"Let's stick with see you later.." He laughed, letting his eyes slide over to the doorway. They had an eavesdropper, though the Nara had a feeling he was probably more than that. It made him want to laugh out loud, the notion was so ridiculous. He couldn't even muster up the badwill to be jealous. Neji had even said he was working on moving on.

"See-ya later Sasuke!" He called out, bursting into laughter when Neji's face suddenly lost all color and emotion.

He turned back to the window and vaulted out, channeling chakra into his feet and landing far more gracefully than he had before when pulling the same stunt, though admittedly it was from a higher elevation. Minor details.

Oh yeah.. He would run into Neji again, especially if he hooked up with Itachi's younger brother. He laughed out loud again as he activated his shadow jutsu, and his shadow turned to solid black, sucking him in.

Sasuke and Neji... the epitome of irony. No wonder the Hyuga had been so suddenly accepting of he and Hidan's relationship. And no wonder Sasuke hadn't wanted to tell him about the brunette's

whereabouts. They were *seeing* each other. Damn his curiosity but he would sure like to know how the hell *that* had happened.

Oh.. Itachi would get a kick out of this... If he told him. Surely he would find out anyway. So yeah.. he'd have to let him know. After all, he'd come to know the older Uchiha pretty well. He didn't need to ditch good friends just because he and Hidan were no longer a thing.

His head was swallowed by the tar then, and it faded back into the normal asphalt afterward.

The world had returned to normal. Everything was okay. He couldn't have asked for a more suitable ending to a more horrifying month. Now it was on to start a new life. To envelop himself in the ways of Jashin, punish those who deserved judgement, right the wrongs, and overall just be a super badass vigilante.

He could do as much.

That was the opposite of troublesome.

That was awesome.

A/N-

HOLYFUCKASSBALLS!

So yeah, this was really, REALLY hard to do. But I think I'm satisfied with it finally. I had to go back and edit it and fix it and add so much shit in there. And it's STILL short. :(

But.. oh well.

Here it is ladies and gents. The last chapter that pertains to the actual plotline. Please, PLEASE tell me what you think as the story as a whole. Did everything tie together? Was the development of the

relationship believable? Did I fucking say fuck way to fucking much?

And if you've already been giving your two-cents throughout, then just let me hear what you think about this chapter. Satisfied with the way things ended? Did you expect it or did I totally blow the fuck right out of your minds again? Does it need more? Does it need less?

Let me know these things people I'm going to need them when making the tri-quel. xD Which you'll be happy to know I already have the first like, 5 chapters planned out. I don't know if I'm going to start immediatly after I finish up these last two additions to this story or take a break for awhile. But I guess you'll find out when it happens. xD

So, thank you everyone who read and reviewed. Thanks especially to SheWolfByakugan who has been with me the entirety of the sequel. It's so funny Shewolf, Fluffy and I would literally just sit there and text each other when talking about RN. Saying things like "She's going to die of a nosebleed and we're going to jail." And things like that. xD We pretty much integrated you into our fanfiction lives.

And also huge thanks to my bestest friend ever who I love and cherish, FluffyisEmo, who helped me with the story by writing *ahem* certian scenes, and better remember me when she's a famous porn author. xD (And also I hear she's thinking about taking requests so.. yeah... attack!)

And this author's not has officially become waaaayyy too long so I'm outta here until the epilogue. So I love you all, review, forgive the typos, yaddayadda. Toodles!

Epilogue- Bad dreams

Recurring Nightmares

Shit.

This was hard. Everything was hard now.

It was so goddamn irritating. He'd turned into such a pansy, seriously. Feeling bad like this, guilty. Regret was useless, guilt was useless. Never before had he ever, ever felt the two at the same time. Not even when Kakuzu died.

But... maybe it was that scar that caused this feeling. That still-tender spot that made it hard even to think about it. His mind instantly pushed it away, as he had subconsciously trained himself to. This was what happened when you allowed yourself to care.

Bullshit. Bullshit is what happens.

He sat on the tallest branch of a Cedar tree, high up in the mountains. The view was breathtaking, or would be if he could take a second to focus on it.

Thank you Jashin for your bounty. He quickly prayed in his head, letting pale lids open to expose the violet iris behind.

Fuck... Two excruciatingly long weeks later, and he still couldn't get that Pineapple headed fucker off his mind. It just wasn't right. What kind of black fucking magic had that bastard used on him?

He couldn't deny that the kid was sexy, seriously, some of the shit he did would cause anyone an instant hard-on. Falling from a building and trashing the entire street, taking a sword through the chest and still threatening the Princess's life, taking out *three* of Kakuzu's hearts in a matter of minutes?

Jashin he was getting goosebumps just thinking about it.

But really... Shikamaru had basically been his student. Well, student with benefits. And for one fucking reason or the other he was now probably capable of surpassing the zealot as Jashin's favorite desciple.

And that wasn't okay. Hidan did not simply get replaced, and especially not in his religion.

Kakuzu's angry shout tore him from his thoughts, and he twisted to glare down at him.

"What the fuck do you want?"

Equally hate-filled eyes met his, and a shiver ran down his spine. Kakuzu was wearing the leather duster... with no mask...

Oh *baby*.

"Get down. We have a bounty." He growled, turning and starting slowly down the incline.

"Tch. Don't fuckin' tell me what to do you old fart." He muttered to himself, stretching his back. No reason to say it louder, he would just be ignored.

He leaned farther backward until he fell from the branch, reaching out and catching the one below. He swung his body forward, letting go only for his knees to curl around another even lower branch. He continued his gymnastics display until he was only 10 feet from the ground, and then just leaped from the weak limb he was balancing on to the forest floor.

Kakuzu had moved them to the shitty little cabin they co-existed in now about a week after they'd left the city. Apparently he wanted something out in the middle of nowhere where Hidan couldn't do so much damage. It was a good point, but it still sucked.

Being miles and miles away from civilization had it's pro's and con's obviously. The crappiest of which being the fact that there wasn't anything to fucking do. The albino had grown tired of wandering around trying to kill whatever animal was unfortunate enough to cross his path. And he'd pretty well already memorized the forest within a two mile radius from their house.

Fuck, it was no wonder he couldn't stop thinking about the Pineapple head. He sure had fucking kept things interesting.

Another con was the fact that you pretty well had to self sufficient. That meant killing and cooking your own food, that meant no electricity, that meant taking a shit in a fucking pitch black outhouse in the middle of he night.

Kakuzu had a garden. A FUCKING GARDEN!

He'd laughed himself nearly to death when the old man had proposed the idea, and then after recovering from the image of big bad Kakuzu in a gardening hat and apron, he'd been forced to help dig up the ground. And as if that hadn't been enough punishment, the bastard made him go find animal shit to fertilize it.

Seriously... what the fuck was he *thinking* moving them way out here?

"Oi! Why don't you walk a little slower, maybe we'll get to town within the next fucking year." He said, easily catching up.

"The higher elevation has less oxygen. Unlike you, I prefer not to kill myself if it can be avoided."

"Bah, just admit that your old bones can't take it. Really Kuzu, why did we have to come stay up here?" He said, kicking at a pebble and then swearing when it bounced off a tree trunk and ricocheted directly into the middle of his forehead.

"Idiot..." older man muttered.

"Hey, don't dodge the question! Why can't we just find some dinky little town or something like always?" He rubbed his forehead as he walked. He pulled his hand away and frowned at the lack of blood. Jeez, getting an injury without bleeding was like a slap to the face... literally.

"Because you keep getting us kicked out."

"That's not true! You pack up and leave before anyone has the chance!"

"That's the point."

"Tch. I think you're just scared." He said, not realizing that Kakuzu had stopped until he was a couple yards in the lead.

He whirled, grimace turning to amusement at the glare he received from the 'older' man. "Aahh, is that it? You're scared of dying again huh!?" He chuckled as Kakuzu continued walking.

"If I were afraid of that we would not be going on another bounty, Hidan." He said, pulling the bingo book from his pocket.

The zealot peeked over his shoulder, but growled when the man in front slapped it shut. "Hey.. I think I'm onto something here eh? That's why you're dragging me along! In case you get attacked by more Jashinists!" Hidan's voice grew louder and louder in his excitement.

"It is a precaution, yes."

"HAH! You ARE afraid!"

"Planning ahead does not make one afraid, it makes them prepared."

Hidan slapped him on the back, "It's okay Kuzu, I'll protect yo-"

Before he could finished he was grabbed by the face and thrown forward, toppling ungracefully down the incline. Straightening his feet, he skidded to a halt with his heels sunk into the dirt and twisted around.

"YOU OLD BASTARD! Why you always gotta resort to fucking violence!" He turned back around to inspect his scuffed elbow mid-sentence.

"Because you won't shut up unless I do." Kakuzu said casually, sauntering past him without a glance.

"Just cos' you're embarrassed doesn't give you the fucking right to throw me down a mountian."

"If you continue to run your mouth then this trip is going to become very painful for you."

The silver-hair gave an irritated sigh and stood up, brushing the dirt from his dark cloak. It was a weird, kind of velvety material, but he liked it. It was soft and kept him warm up here in this frigid air. And the best part was that the inside was this awesome deep, shiney black that when it caught the light just right, reflected purple.

It was the exact color of the Pineapple Head's chakra.

He wasn't being obsessive, and he wasn't acting like a broken-hearted teen girl either. It was an awesome fucking color, one that reminded him of the little badass he used to run around with. And besides, it was thanks to the spikey haired kid that he could do half the shit he could do now. Kakuzu almost seemed mad at the fact that obtaining the kids abilities made this whole living-in-the-wilderness thing a hell of a lot easier. Ever tried to run down a moose with nothing but a scythe? No chakra to boost your speed, no extra strength to cut it's head clean off, and if the fucker knocked your weapon out of your hands, you were fucked. That's two tons of fat-fucking-moose smashing down repeatedly onto your ribcage with goddamn pointy fucking hooves.

Yeah, if anything, Kakuzu should be *happy* he could do these things. Otherwise he really wouldn't EVER stop whining!

"I don't see why I can't just jump you up there. Why do we have to walk?" He droned again, pushing a low hanging branch out of his way as he caught up to Kakuzu.

"Because that technique is not yours and you don't know how to do it correctly. It also drains a massive amount of your *borrowed* chakra. We need to conserve our energy."

"Don't know how to- Are you retarded? Just because it makes *you* sick to your old, wrinkley stomache. If you'd just accept Jashin into your life he would give you a nice young body." This was true, hell, he himself was hundreds and hundreds of years old. Was there a single wrinkle anywhere on him? Cellulite? Armflaps? Nope, he'd be twenty-two until the day the earth blew up and he went hurdling through space, laughing while everyone else suffocated and died.

Wait a second... twenty two! That's how old he was! Well.. how old he'd been when he died and been resurrected.

He choked suddenly, as if someone had a grip around his throat and was squeezing so tightly that his eyes would pop out of his head. His body locked up and he fell backward onto the declining terrain.

The memory came flooding back, and the sky above him faded away, replaced with a soggy, concrete brick ceiling lit by flickering torchlight. He heard sobbing, and looked down to find a dark-haired man slumped over the side of his bed, or what he assumed was a bed, it looked more like a blanket thrown over some hay.

He tried to say something, to ask where the fuck he was, what was going on, who the hell this stranger was, but only a moan came out. And the horrible agony he remembered being in came flooding into every inch of him.

The crying man looked up, he had a ponytail on the lower portion of his head that spiked out backward. A few stray chunks of his bangs had worked loose and fell down over his face. His eyes, so dark and calculating, so full of intelligence as well as pain and hopelessness, red from the tears still leaking freely widened when their eyes locked.

Holy fucking hell, it was the Pineapple head. No, that wasn't possible.. but, holy shit it looked *just* like him. Only wearing random scraps of fabric for clothes, and his head didn't look so pineappley at the moment.

"You're alive.." The stranger said, nearly sending Hidan into hysteria. He sounded just like the kid too, but with a heavy accent. Holy shit what was going on here?

"It worked! I brought you back!" The not-pinepple head cried out, scrambling to his feet only long enough to pounce and wrap his arms around Hidan. Again he tried to ask what happened, who this person was, where the hell they were, but he could do nothing but wheeze.

Get off me you idiot! He wanted to say, but couldn't. It hurt so bad, being smashed like that. His body felt like it had been asleep, all pins and needles. His very skin burned with the return of bloodflow.

"I killed him Hidan! I managed to do it! I cut him into bits and buried him. He can't keep living unless he keeps sacrificing! I gave Jashin my soul so he'd give you the immortality. And it worked! *YOU'RE ALIVE!*"

He was squeezed even further as the stranger buried his head into the nape of his neck. Dammit! Why couldn't he talk!?

"Your soul.." He heard his own voice grumble out, the same heavy accent pervading it. What the hell, he hadn't meant to say that. He was talking without his own permission.. What was this

Tears leaked even heavier from the dark eyes as he lifted his head and stared so close that their noses nearly touched. "Yes.. He.. he

said he wanted it. I don't know what for. He said he was going to need it later on.. But.. That's not what's important. How do you feel?"

"Aweful.." He croaked, trying to move his body.

"Perfect. That just proves that this isn't a dream. I thought you were dead for good! I thought I'd failed you.."

Hidan's eyes widened then as the man leaned forward and kissed him, cupping the sides of his face. No, wait, this wasn't right! Men.. men didn't kiss each other! No wait, yes they did. Why was he thinking that? He did it all the time...

The man pulled away and smiled. "Now you can kill them all. You can send their souls to Jashin and let him pass judgement on them for all they've done to us. They can't keep us apart anymore, we're children of Jashin Almighty."

Hidan stared blankly. Yes.. yes. The entire village hated them. Because they knew of their secret. Men couldn't like men, it was a sin. It was blasphemous, they worshipped the devil, they must be burned at the stake. His wife even, turned against him, when she of all people should know that he never loved her. She'd lied as much as anyone, telling the townspeople she couldn't have children, when the fact of the matter is he couldn't bear to be with her in that way.

He.. he remembered everything!

The Hyuga man who'd travelled around the world, the man they'd tried to kill but couldn't. The immortal man, the one who'd taught them in the ways of Jashin, the one who'd accepted them, told them that they had been brought together for a reason. The man who'd taken them on as his students, taught them how to do a circle, how to make an offering, how to meditate. How could he have forgotten all this!? How could he have been a follower of Jashin all along without even knowing it?

"You look more beautiful than before Hidan. You should see yourself.." The stranger said, brushing a silver lock out of his eyes. "You're like an angel.. It's so perfect.. I wouldn't even know it was you if I hadn't been sitting here..."

He was about to comment when his face erupted in a stinging pain, like he'd been slapped, and suddenly a huge channel of air whoosed into his lungs. He hadn't even realized he'd been dreaming.. wait.. no. This wasn't a dream. His lover had killed their master, murdered him in cold blood. How could he do such a thing?

"You.. you killed him!?" His own still-gravelley voice said, making the dark haired man's eyes go wide.

"Yes, I had to Hidan. You were dying! To.. to kill someone you love is the ultimate sacrifice.. remember? I had to do it, I had to save you!"

"You killed our master!" The only person to have ever accepted them, the only person to let them be themselves. The only person that didn't make him hate himself for feeling the way he did, the only human to take away the steady ache in his chest he'd been living with for so long, the nearly unbearable but always intangible pain of loving someone he couldn't have. He was dead, the only being in the world he'd ever loved had been murdered by the.. the other man he loved.

"His soul is mine. I want it now." A bone rattling voice whispered into his ear. He knew who it was without knowing. He wanted it now.. Oh Jashin. No.. not already. Not now.

No.. no. Please don't make me do it...

"A deal is a deal. Give it to me."

I.. I can't. You can't ask me to do this!

"It is only temporary, my child. Use the anger, use the frustration, use the pain."

He screamed, his body suddenly flooding with the unwanted power. Feeding on his emotions, forcing his body upward, shoving his lover off him in the process. The ponytailed man said something, but he couldn't hear him. He could only see the look of fear in his still-wet eyes.

He kept screaming, he couldn't stop. It hurt, it hurt so bad. He couldn't do it. Not on his own. This couldn't be real, this couldn't be happening.

Please Jashin..no..

Another sharp pain in his cheek. What the hell was that? What was going on?

His hand wrapped around the his terrified lovers throat, still screaming. He couldn't stop, he couldn't do it. No..nonono.. he had to stop himself. He couldn't live through this, not without at least one of them.. His master was gone already..

The dark haired man didn't fight it. He only stared in horror, breathing heavily at Hidan, like a poor helpless rabbit about to keep beheaded and skinned. Deep black eyes stared into his very soul, killing him in the worst possible way.

Don't look at me.. don't look at me while I kill you.

With his other arm he reached out to the floor, grabbing the first chunk of stone he found, and without even sparing it a second thought he closed his eyes, smashing it into the mans skull while he held him in place by the throat.

His scream turned into a laugh at the sight of the blood, and he leaned forward to lick it off. He pushed up to his feet, unable to control his body while his head and heart alike wailed in agony. Jashin had him, he was going to take his only reason for living. The person who had gave him his life back so they could share it was going to die by his very own possessed hands.

He dragged the weakly struggling body across the dirty, bloodsoaked floor. He heard the pleading and begging. He heard apologizing, he heard the man scream out his name and tell him he loved him. Hidan broke with each one, his insides shattered as he wished so openly for death. Anything to stop this from happening. How could he go on like this? Without him? What was the point?

I give it back. I don't want it... don't make me... don't make me live like this.

"Make a circle." His gritty, accented voice said, throwing the profusely bleeding man to the floor. He twisted around, staring back up at him in betrayal and sorrow. "He wants you *now*. Make. A. Circle."

Stop it. Just stop it! Why couldn't he stop!? Oh No please, someone wake him up. He couldn't relive it. He couldn't do it.

I don't want to remember! Take it away! Take it away!

The man slowly wiped his own blood off and made the Jashin symbol around himself, and then grabbed pulled the sword from it's sheath, handing it up to Hidan with his head bowed. He wasn't even going to put up a fight. He was going to succumb to the slaughter god's will just like that. When they'd not had but a moment together in his new life.

"Make it fast.. please.." He sobbed quietly.

Stop it.

"I love you Hidan."

STOP IT!

"I sacrifice myself so you can live. Let Jashin lead you, and don't resist."

His body raised the weapon above his head, eyes stinging and teeth clenched. He fought it with all his might. His body hesitated, shaking so violently he thought he might be able to just wiggle the sword free of his grip.

"See you later." His voice said, and he felt a hot tear stream down his cheek. Doe-like eyes stared back up at him, grinding the shards of his heart into dust.

"I hope so..."

And then the blade came down, forcing its way through his own chest.

xx

He flailed back into awareness, His fist colliding with something and someone shouting in shock and pain as he gasped for air.

In the next second the side of his face exploded with pain and the other side smashed into soil. He groaned, not even trying to get up and in fact letting the rest of his body fall limply to the ground.

"Dammit Hidan!" Someone growled behind him. It took a few moments and a few more breaths of air before he could finally attach a name to the sound.

"Kah... Kakuzu?"

"You broke my nose you idiot.." His partner said, and Hidan whimpered again as a sharp kick sent more pain reeling through his body.

"Stop.. hurting me.." He moaned, trying to will the memories away, trying to resist the sobs teetering just on the edge of his voice. He didn't cry. He never cried. And especially not in front of the atheist, money-grubbing old man.

"Then get up. You've wasted half an hour laying there, passed out. We could be at sea-level by now."

Hidan listened quietly to the snapping of twigs as the older man walked away, and he clenched a fistful of dirt in his hand, trying to get himself to get up and follow. That's what the stinging had been.. Kakuzu was trying to slap him awake. It *had* been a dream.. but not so much a dream as.. a vision. An unwilling vision he'd received of the memories his mind had blocked.

Jashin.. Why'd you make me remember..?

It wasn't fair... He'd given the slaughter God everything. *Everything*. How could he bring those terrible memories back? How could he put him through that nightmare again? How could he make him look into those eyes... Pineapple heads eyes.. But that wasn't him, his name hadn't been Shikamaru then.. It was.. what was it?

Dammit, he couldn't even give him a name? Not even his masters name?

Jashin you cruel bastard...

"Kakuzu.. wait." He grunted, forcing chakra into his arms to give him the strength to push himself to his knees. He felt so weak now, with no willpower. All the jealousy was gone. He.. he couldn't.. he couldn't do it.. how could he go on knowing what he'd done? Remembering that awful night.. he would rather have just gone on thinking he was insane. And... he was. Who wouldn't have gone insane from such a thing? Living that kind of life and being forced to do those kinds of things...

The footfalls stopped, and he turned to find the 'older' man staring back at him. It was a glare at first, and then something softened. Three slow heartbeats went by when the man in the leather trenchcoat finally turned and came back, stopping to stand over Hidan. The Jashinist couldn't do anything but stare pathetically up at him, as if expecting him to help in some way but not knowing how.

Kakuzu couldn't make them go away. They would be forever branded there in his mind. Looking into eyes that were Shikamaru's.. but not. Eyes pleading for mercy, for life. Being told he was loved... He.. he'd never heard anyone say those words to him since then. Since all that time ago, since Midevil times. Before anything that he could remember living without...

"What's wrong?" Kakuzu's deep, even voice asked.

He opened his mouth to answer.. but he couldn't think of what to say. I just remembered the day after I died? Yeah, that wouldn't sound ridiculous. Somehow he stood up, wobbling on his feet. Kakuzu's eyes narrowed before Hidan fell forward, saying a silent prayer when the coffee-skinned man actually caught him.

"I.. I can't.." he muttered, his throat starting to burn. Oh no.. Oh Jashin no don't let him start crying. He couldn't cry on Kakuzu like this. He would just drop him or hit him or tell him to shut up...

"Why am I... alive? I don't.. I don't want to anymore.." He finally said, feeling a drop race down his cheek. No dammit, this was so pathetic. Kakuzu was silent, but didn't drop him or hit him.

"It hurts again.." he whispered closing his eyes tightly shut. It was the same feeling. The hopeless, lost, empty hole sitting there throbbing in the place where his heart should be. "It hurts so bad."

Damn, why did his sanity have to return now? Why couldn't he just brush this away like everything else? he couldn't just shake it off and move on, and quite frankly it was pissing him off. This was bullshit, feeling so weak and vulnerable. And of course it had to be in the middle of the fucking wilderness with no one but Kakuzu to comfort him.

Why did he even need comforting? God he was centuries old, right? Why the fucking hell did he even still feel anything anymore?

The arms holding him squeezed tighter, and his eyes flashed open. Cautiously, he lifted his head to look into green and red eyes. They stared down at him half-lidded, not angry or awkward.

"I remember.. Kuzu. What happened when I lost my mortality.." He muttered, staring up in awe at the foreign emotion of the older man's face. "I don't want to.. Make it go away again.."

"I'm not your scapegoat.." The taller man murmured, his actions betraying him as he lowered his head further and brought their lips gently together. It was a simple little kiss, nothing more than a peck, but the pain suddenly felt far away, and his heart didn't feel like it was being ripped from his chest any longer.

Kakuzu pulled his head back and ran a hand through the silver hair. "Well all have our nightmares. You just have to make reality worth waking up to. That's the secret to living forever."

Finally Hidan managed to crack a smile, and the stitched corners of his lovers mouth twitched as well, before he was shoved away. He stumbled for a moment before finally losing his balance and landing on his ass.

"Ow... Dammit old man... That hurt."

"I thought you liked pain." He replied, walking off again. Hidan scrambled to his feet and trotted after him.

"Yeah, well.. not enough to enjoy you beating on me all the time. You need to invest in some anger management therapy, seriously.."

Kakuzu grunted and Hidan took a breath, giving the world a melancholy smile. Yeah.. Make reality worth waking up to.. Damn. What had he been so sad about anyway? Pineapple head obviously wasn't dead anymore, in fact he could never die again.

Oh wait... He almost forgot. He should probably tell Kakuzu he had to go looking for him twice a year.. Damn that old bastard was going

to be so jealous.

A sneer crept across the albinos face, and he broke into a jog. "Oh hey, I forgot to tell you something.."

"It better not be something stupid."

"Tch, you think everything is stupid."

"Everything that comes out of your mouth *is* stupid."

"Fuck you old man.."

"Insufferable idiot.."

Well... he could tell him later. He had a few more months to go anyway. He kicked absently at another pebble. This was going to be a long fucking walk. Damn it. Stupid bounty, stupid cabin... At least no one else was around, maybe that was why Kakuzu had actually been nice to him.

"What did you need to tell me?" The stoic man stated, and Hidan smiled, nudging him with his elbow.

"That I love you."

"Shut up Hidan."

"Don't deny your feelings for me Kuzu."

"I don't deny anything. I just want you to stop talking."

Hidan froze at this, everything but his feet at least. He stared at the 'older' man who refused to look back. That was the closest he would ever get to hearing it again. At least for now, he could work on it later, after all, they had all the time in the world.

He ripped his gaze away, planting it on the ground and forcing himself not to smile. Cautiously he reached out sideways and

grabbed a calloused, tanned hand. Holding his breath, he waited for the pain to come, for his body to be slammed into a tree or for his arm to be ripped out of its socket or any manner of such violence.

But it didn't come, only a small squeeze from the opposing hand.

It took every single ounce of the admittedly lacking self control he had to keep himself from shouting for joy. Kuzu was back, *his* Kuzu. And with these baby steps, he could make his immortal life worth living. As long as Jashin didn't fuck anything else up.

No offense, Jashin. And thank you for the gift..

Even if it was kind of a drag...

A/N-

Ah. The long awaited Hidan POV. It's about frikin' time Wierdo!
DAMN!

I need a tissue. Bleh, oh fuck that was really hard. And I still feel like I didn't do a very good job explaining everything and portraying it the way I imagine in my head. I've literally been writing for like... 10 hours straight now. My son is sick and I had to stay home with him so I just went ahead and belted out two fucking chapters in a row. So, you should love me.

I made myself all depressed with this shit. I need a Kuzu to make it better. T-T

Someone send me a plushie Kakuzu. For serious.

Okayyyy yeah, so I'm going to wait awhile on the bonus chapter now. And by awhile I probably mean like... a day. xD Cause, well you know how I am. I have no life. If you have any questions then ask them in your review and I'll Pm you and try to explain better. This of

course means you can't comment with a guest count. *Glares at all the Guest reviews*

Anyway uh.. well... my brain is fried so I can't think of anything else.

Thanks for reading, forgive typos and slashes, and review!

Loves.

Bonus Chapter - Unnatural Affection

Recurring Nightmares

"Why are you so worked up about it?"

"Because it's stupid! I can't believe you let him see you. You're lucky he didn't freak out and attack you."

"Hn. He wouldn't. And besides, he's never been easy to fool. He would have figured out sooner or later. I did you a favor."

"You *purposely* let him find out!?"

"Did I not make it clear enough for you?"

"GOD you're so... ugh I can't even think of the word."

"Hn. Join the club. I hear they have 'Sasuke's a tool' shirts now."

Neji stopped his ranting to lift his head from the cradle of his hands. He stared at the Uchiha sitting at the bar across the island with perfect brows creased. "I don't think you're a tool." He said softly, "I just wish you weren't so headstrong. Shikamaru is *my* ex. I'll make the decisions that involve him."

"Suit yourself." Sasuke said with a sigh.

"And don't give me so much attitude!" Neji snapped, receiving an eyeroll in response.

"I don't have attitude. It's just how I talk, you diva. Get used to it."

The younger brother slid from the barstool and trudged over to the couch in the connecting living area, sitting on the armrest sideways and falling so his back rested on the seat cushions.

Neji sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. Good Lord what the hell had he been thinking, getting involved with Sasuke of all people. Shikamaru must think he's such a hypocritical bastard after the fuss the brunette had made about him and the Psycho. Sasuke *had* tried to kill him... well accordig to Shiks he'd only been hired to make him believe he was going to kill him.. but the concept didn't change. The younger Sharingan user had beaten him within an inch of his life, and now they were relaxing at his apartment like the awkward couple they were.

At least... he thought they were. There hadn't been an official declaration, But Sasuke was here at every second he could get away from his elder sibling, it seemed... So he would go ahead and assume.

"You want anything to drink?"

"Got any KD?"

"Uh, no. For the hundredth time I don't drink liquor. If you want it you have to bring it yourself."

"Hn. Pretty sure I spotted a winebox in your pantry."

"That's not liquor and you can't have any."

"It's too girly for me anyway."

"It's classy dammit! I know a lot of men that preffered whine over whiskey!"

"Yeah and they all wish they were women."

Neji opened his mouth to continue argueing, but immediatly slapped it shut and took a deep breath through his nose and out his mouth.

God, what was he thinking?

Just cause a pair of dark eyes look his way he's suddenly swooning? So what if he'd more or less had a small crush on the Uchiha in highschool? He was an adult, it was too late to fulfill teenage fantasies. Even if it was exciting to find out Sasuke wasn't perfectly straight like he'd assumed back when there was constantly a posse of drooling girls around him... that didn't mean he needed to put up with the brooding asshole's bullshit.

The guy had emotional problems, that's okay, everyone did. But being rude to others didn't solve anything. In fact it made it worse. He drove everyone away so he didn't have to face his issues..

And maybe that's what attracted the Hyuga? Sasuke was a project... Like those girls that brought home deadbeats thinking they could change them into better people.

... That was a terrible way to look at it..

He would just stick with the old 'Opposites attract' theory.

Yeah, that was much more satisfactory.

"Why can't you relax without being drunk?" He asked softly, surrendering to the dark-haired hunk of a man and pulling two wineglasses from the cabinet over the sink.

"Why can't you just relax and *get* drunk?"

"Don't answer a question with a question."

"Yes mommy."

"Ugh.. fine. Here, Go get your precious alcohol."

Sasuke gave a sarcastic smile and hopped off the couch, slipping past the island to grab both glasses and making a beeline to the pantry.

"Maybe you should just accept me." He said, pulling out the entire box and returning to the couch. He set everything on the coffee table and glanced back up at Neji expectantly. The brunette rolled his eyes and stalked into the living area to seat himself awkwardly beside his... whatever Sasuke was to him right now.

Sasuke gracefully opened the container and filled both glasses in one fluid motion, and grabbed his before leaning backward to make himself comfortable. Neji hesitantly grabbed his, staring at the nearly translucent liquid while he swirled it around. It was 2 in the afternoon... was he seriously going to give in to peer pressure again? Just because the peering came from gorgeous ebony eyes?

"You and everyone else..." He muttered, clinking his glass against Neji's and downing the entire thing.

Neji took a small sip and looked up to the youngest Uchiha in interest. "What makes you think I don't accept you?"

Sasuke poured another glass and shrugged, swirling it. "No one does. No one ever has. 'Tachi comes close but he acts more like he's trying to *fix* me than to just be a friend. Like he has to raise me all over again because it wasn't done right the first time."

He gulped down half the glass and stared at the ceiling unfocused.

Neji chewed his lip, unsure of exactly what to say. Sasuke was opening up.. He'd never remembered the man to do that before. Perhaps his personality had changed a bit after he and his brother decided to stop being estranged... but it wasn't as if it would do a 360.

"I... kind of know what that's like. After you..erm.. well after we moved, Shikamaru was always around, clinging to me and suffocating me and trying to make me feel better. All I wanted was for everything to be normal, and it wasn't, especially with him buzzing around me constantly. Like he was trying to fix me when I just wanted to grieve for a bit..." He stared at Sasuke, fighting the

strange anxiety that had come over him suddenly. "I mean. It's not the same at all compared to what you went through but, I'm saying I kind of understand how it feels... if.. that makes sense..."

Sasuke cracked a half-smile when his eyes lowered again to meet the pupiless pale blue.

"No... not really. But you get brownie points for trying."

Neji continued to study him. He definitely was different. Last time he'd really looked into those eyes they'd been souless and emppt. Hard and uncaring, with no will to live but still afraid of the unknown that came after death. He *had* been a broken man back then, hurting people just for money.

They'd changed though. Not anything huge, but something more subtle that was just beneath the surface. Less despair... and more hope, maybe. Less anger and more satisfaction, contentment.

Itachi's influence really had made a drastic difference, even if it was hard to see...

"So... You've been following me because your brother told you to, right?"

Sasuke Mm-hmm'd while finishing off the second half of the glass.

"And what made you decide to show yourself again?"

"I was supposed to make sure you didn't do anything stupid again. The easiest way to prevent it was to let you know I was watching." He paused, giving the Hyuga a teasing sneer. "Since you're so scared of me."

Perfect brows furrowed, and he took another quick sip of the wine before answering. "Pardon me for being a little traumatized after thinking I was going to die."

"Hn. I wouldn't have killed you."

"And how was I supposed to know? You tricked me into thinking you killed those officers. I thought you were the murderer and I was next!"

"That was the point ya dope."

Neji gave an exasperated sigh, staring at the wineglass again before tipping it back and downing what was practically still a whole glass.

This was insane. Having a crush on Sasuke... it made no sense. None at all.

He wasn't even sure when it happened. All he knew was he'd sprinted to his car and sped the entire way back to his apartment that night after he'd tried to take out Hidan. He couldn't stop crying, it had almost caused him to wreck 4 separate times. He didn't even care about the Psycho or the bounty on his soul. All he could think about was that blade going through the man he used to love's chest. The look in his eyes, like he didn't even realize what was going on until he looked down and saw it. The wave of sheer terror Neji felt, knowing there was no way he could survive that. Knowing there was nothing he could do to help. He didn't have a phone on him, he couldn't carry him up all those stairs and drag him to the hospital. He had just killed Shikamaru, and all over that stupid albino bastard.

Of course he'd left when Shika told him to. Did he have any other choice? If he hadn't left, his ex would have free'd Hidan and the psycho would have killed him.

It was either run away or watch Shikamaru die. Maybe he was a coward for choosing the latter, but apparently it had worked out anyway. It would have saved him a lot of stress knowing he had spontaneously become unkillable.

He'd practically jumped out of his car before it stopped moving, and scrambled to find the keys to the small complex in his hysteria. He dropped the keyring once, twice, and then on the third time he had

screamed in frustration and sadness, punching the door and then pressing his back flat against it. His hands covered his face as he sobbed and slid down the door until he was huddled at the base, and he moved his arms to hug his legs, burying his face in his knees.

All he could think over and over again was that Shikamaru was dead. He was dead and Neji had killed him.

Over and over the thought replayed in his mind as he sobbed uncontrollably at the front door of the complex, unable to even get himself into the comfort and privacy of his own home before breaking down completely.

He'd sat there for an eternity until suddenly something thunked down in front of him. His eyes opened to watch a porcelain skinned hand with covered forearms reach down and pick up his keyring.

When he followed it upward and met the dark eyes of the youngest Uchiha, he'd literally thought his heart stopped.

Shit! He's back! He's back to finish the job even though he didn't technically want to kill me in the first place!

All Neji could do was make a pathetic squeaking sound as he stared, petrified, up at Sasuke. He was regarded with an unreadable, stoic gaze before the man extended his hand to Neji.

"You need to go inside if you're going to cry." Was all he'd said, but there had been no threat, no menace or even irritation in the inexplicably calm voice.

The Hyuga had instinctively activated his byakugan, and upon seeing this Sasuke blinked his own sharingan on as well.

"If you attack me I will defend myself. Otherwise you're not in trouble."

Neji had noticed the strangest thing then. That Sasuke's chakra was gold. He'd never seen anyone with gold chakra before, so as to whether or not it was rare or not, he was unsure of.

It was dazzling however, unlike Shikamaru's dark, almost-black, purple or his own deep teal. For some reason it calmed him. Though it didn't make sense at all. He couldn't recall what color it had been those two years ago. And that fact alone was strange, though in all fairness he'd been preoccupied with fighting for his life.

Byakugan lit eyes flicked up to meet intimidating red and black sharingan. And, swallowing heavily, he let the technique down. If Sasuke meant to harm him, he would have by now.

Cautiously he lifted his hand and grasped the one still extended, and with nothing but a small tug from the other man he pulled himself to his feet, taking the keys offered to him.

"Good night." Sasuke said as soon as the lock clicked and the knob twisted open. Neji whirled to see the Uchiha strolling calmly away.

"Wait!" He called out, halting the other. "Why... are you here?"

"Itachi instructed me to keep an eye on you while he assisted Hidan with helping Nara recover." He turned around, expression perfectly blank. "So go to bed."

"He's alive!?" Neji'd exclaimed, forgetting completely about the fact that this was Sasuke Uchiha, the man who'd nearly killed him that he was talking to.

"For the moment he is."

Neji's spirits dropped again, and Sasuke waited for only a moment before turning away to continue, only for Neji to call out again.

"So you're going to just sit outside my apartment until morning or what?"

"Not directly outside. But I'll be in the neighborhood."

"Well..." Neji said, chewing his lip. There was no way he could just go inside and go about his business knowing that he was being watched. He sniffed once more and cleared his throat, absently wiping his eyes as well. "You can come in if you want. I know you're here anyways so there's no reason to stalk me like some creeper."

Sasuke studied him for a moment before a single brow rose, the first emotion Neji had seen on him all night. "Do you have alcohol?"

"Erm... I have some Peppermint schnapps I think..." Neji said, slightly taken off guard at this question. He honestly had expected him to decline, really, he wouldn't have asked if he thought the man would consider it.

"Alright." Sasuke shrugged, his shoulders relaxing as he turned on heel and sauntered toward a dumbstruck Neji. "A little girly, but not bad."

Neji's mouth bobbed open and close as he tried to come up with something to say to deter the Uchiha before he made it through the doorway. But he couldn't think of any excuses, all he could do was curse himself and whatever spirit had possessed him to make the offer in the first place.

They'd climbed the stairs in silence, and when they reached his apartment he hesitated for a second. God.. what would this look like? Inviting this person into his house after nearly murdering his ex. People would start calling him a black widow.

"Uhm..." He said dumbly, fiddling with his keys.

"Stop fidgeting it's not a damn date. God, you *are* a princess."

Neji stiffened. "Excuse me?"

"You. Are. A princess." Sasuke said, dragging out the last word.
"Stop trying to be perfect, it's unnecessary stress. I'm not gonna fuck you, I just want a drink. Chill out."

The Hyuga's mouth dropped open involuntarily. *What.. he can't say that! He can't call me that! And who brought sex into the matter?*

"Whah... You..."

Sasuke smirked and snatched the key out of his hand that'd he'd finally singled out as the one that unlocked the door. He turned and after a second and a small click the door swung open and the Uchiha let himself inside. Neji followed, seething now, with Shikamaru and the psycho gone completely from his mind. Who the hell just waltzed into someone's home like that!?

Sasuke paused for only a heartbeat to scan the dwelling before stepping quickly to the refrigerator. He pulled open the freezer and made a satisfied noise before reaching in and pulling out the alcohol.

"I figured you for a freezer type. You probably put ice in it too huh?"

"Hey! I don't know who taught you your manners but-"

"Hey, relax. Kay? You need it, or you're gonna pop." The dark hair interrupted, opening and shutting cupboard doors in search of what Neji could assume was something to pour it in.

Well at least he was thoughtful enough not to slobber all over the bottle.

Neji sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose, finally turning to shut the door. "Top cabinet on the far left, the one beside the sink. Get the plastic ones."

"Ah." The Uchiha said, opening the aforementioned cabinet and pulling out two plastic cups, one pink and one blue. "You're probably one of those people that mixes huh?"

"No." Neji said lowly, coming to a stop at the island and glaring with his arms crossed. "I don't want any anyway."

Finally Sasuke stopped his movement and sighed. He looked up at Neji and a jolt of anxiety went through the Hyuga's chest. Damn.. he had gorgeous eyes when they weren't full of murderous intent.

"You probably need a drink more than I do. You invited me in, don't be rude."

He scoffed. " *ME!*? How am I being rude?"

"Because your guest wants a drink and you refuse to have one with him. That's inconsiderate."

"Incon-How can you accuse me of being... rrrgh. What's wrong with you? Why are you suddenly acting so friendly. You tried to kill me!"

Sasuke smirked at this, pouring the alcohol into both cups until they were a fourth full. "Hey, *You* invited me in."

"I didn't think you'd actually have the nerve to accept!"

"I never turn down free booze."

"Yeah well you can have the whole thing if you just go away."

"Are you bribing me?"

"Sure. Whatever gets you out."

Sasuke stared for a second before picking up the blue cup and making his way casually to the couch. "I'd rather stay here. I have to watch you until Itachi gives me word to come back, and this beats sitting on the roof for hours on end by a longshot."

Neji jerked his gaze away and eyed the pink cup. Of course he would get him pink... why did he even *have* pink? He hated pink! Stupid Sasuke, inconsiderate douche.

"And besides, I made you forget all about Nara didn't I?"

Neji blinked. Holy shit, he really had forgotten. Oh God.. Shikamaru might be dying right now and he was considering getting drunk with Sasuke. What the fuck? His spirits dropped to the floor and he lowered his vision. What would he do if Shika died? He... he could never live with himself. God this couldn't seriously be happening, not when everything was starting to get better, after they'd finally talked everything out and forgiven each other...

"Hey." Sasuke's voice suddenly right beside him made him jump. He turned to stare at a pair of uncomfortably close but unbearably, gut-churningly, irresistably, beautiful black eyes.

"Have a drink and relax. If he weren't gonna make it he'd be dead by now and Tachi would have told me to get my ass home. You're going to kill my buzz." He said the last bit slowly, separating the words as if it would be the worst thing that could ever happen.

Neji's first thought was that Sasuke was a lightweight if that small bit of schnapps had him buzzing. His second thought was that the first thought wasn't important and he shouldn't be thinking about it. His third though had been that Sasuke needed to back up, because he smelled really, *really* good. And the fourth had been an internal slap to the face that finally motivated him to slip around the Uchiha and grab the cup and the bottle of alcohol and make his way to the couch.

Okay.. well.. that was a small comfort, at least. Shikamaru was alive, and being cared for... by a psycho and his criminal friend... Bah! How could he relax!? It was impossible! Especially with frikin' Sasuke goddamn Uchiha in his apartment being all buddy-buddy with him.

"I thought you hated your brother..." He muttered, for the sake of ending the awkward silence.

"Yeah well. I thought I did too."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Had Sasuke always been so chatty? No.. He distinctly remembered him always sitting away in the back of the classroom brooding.

"It means I used to, but now I just dislike him."

"What's the difference?"

"Between hate and dislike? I thought you were some genius..."

"I know but... well what changed?" Neji finally inhaled and held his breath, downing the contents of the pink cup in one go. His stomach burned immediately but at least his mouth felt minty and fresh.

"None of your business, that's what." Sasuke replied, coming to plop down beside the brunette and pouring himself another cup.

Neji just studied him. What the hell was going on here? Sasuke being nice? Did that... did that even happen?

His eyes trailed down to the 'emo sleeves' on the younger Uchiha's arm. He.. he'd always worn those sleeves. As long as he could remember he'd kept his arms covered. The Hyuga had never thought anything of it until now.

His gaze moved down further to his own hands, halfway hidden behind the unnecessarily long sleeves of his sweater. He'd even gone so far as to poke holes to stick his thumbs through to make sure they wouldn't slide back and expose his scarred skin to the world.

That was why he wore them, wasn't it? To keep people from seeing. He wasn't as closed off to the world as everyone thought.

"I've never seen your arms." He said, only slightly aware that the tension he'd felt before was gone. Or at least reduced, seeing as the

younger Uchiha seemed to stiffen a little bit before covering it with pouring himself more.

"So?"

Neji eyed him, resisting the urge to tease him about the one thing he actually seemed troubled with. "So.. what's underneath those sleeves?"

Sasuke finished gulping down the alcohol, sucked in a breath through clenched teeth, and slammed the cup down on the table. He glared at it for a minute before to Neji with a dark look that brought all the anxiety whooshing back. Apparently that was more than a touchy subject, it was a button that clearly read 'DO NOT PUSH.'

"What the fuck do you think is under there?" He said, not breaking his heavy stare.

The brunette fidgeted and twisted a piece of his hair absently.
"Well..."

"Did the entire world tell you how fucked up I am? My brother killed my family, 'Don't go near him! He's not *right!*'"

"No! That's not-"

"You know what's under here, idiot. Don't ask stupid questions."

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to-"

"Well you did."

He bit his tongue. Trying to explain didn't do any good, he kept getting interrupted. He refilled his cup, just as something to occupy himself with during the suddenly unbearable silence. he didn't mean to insult him, honestly. He wanted to have an actual conversation about it. He had the scars too, after all.

He paused for just a second as this thought sunk in, and then lifted the schnopps and took a small drink, wrinkling his nose as he forced himself to swallow it and not gag. Damn.. maybe he *should* have mixed it.

He set the cup down, and fidgeted with the tattered end of his own shirt sleeves for a moment, unsure as to whether he really wanted to share these with someone like Sasuke. Someone who he barely even knew, someone who had assisted in driving him to commit the act in the first place. He wasn't even sure if he'd forgiven the younger brother yet. Really, he'd been put in the Intensive Care of the hospital. It wasn't like he just accidentally shoved a sword through his... chest..

Oh dammit. He'd reminded himself again.

He fell backward onto the couch, not even caring at such an unrefined position. Sasuke glanced from the corner of his eye, but didn't react, only taking another large gulp of his beverage.

"You really think he'll be okay?"

"He's fine. Stop asking."

"I'm just worried. You don't have to be an ass."

"And you don't have to act like such a girl."

Neji pushed himself back up, glaring. "I'm sorry about asking about your arms, Okay!? God, I didn't know it was such a big deal!"

Sasuke turned, eyes sparking with anger. "Why the hell wouldn't it be a big deal?! If I keep them covered up it's obviously not because I want people fucking asking about them!"

"Yeah well Just wearing stupid sleeves like that and a short-sleeved shirt looks stupid. That's like begging people to ask!"

"Oh yes, princess. Please enlighten me as to how the world works. I'm sure you're not ignorant and spoiled."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?" Neji said, brows creasing. Really, what the hell was his problem? All he'd done was ask a question.

"It means you don't know anything about me, so stop trying to relate. We're nothing alike. Get it through your head." Sasuke said, angrily pouring himself another drink.

The Hyuga chewed on the inside of his lips, taking deep breaths.

"Maybe *you* should stop trying to seperate yourself. You're the one whose making everything worse." He said, standing up and then plopping back down when the world shifted a little too fast. He stuttered on, trying to cover up the fact that he couldn't walk. Good God he'd only had like... well.. not very much. "When you isolate yourself and make yourself even more alone, it just makes it worse. You don't even give people the chance to *try* to get to know you. You're right I don't know anything about you, because you won't tell me. All I know is you made up with your brother and you're a little more alive than the last time I looked at you."

Sasuke only studied him, only the barest hints of his previous anger still evident on his features.

"I know. Maybe I haven't been fighting it my whole life, but I went through it too. You feel alone on the inside, so you make yourself alone in reality. It just makes everything worse. It doesn't help the pain, it makes it worse. And the inner pain, just like the loneliness, forces it's way to the outside of your body..." He looked down and pulled back both his sleeves, determined not to look at the Uchiha's reaction. "And then you end up making these ugly scars in places where everyone can see. Because you're so desperate for someone to care.. but then when they see them you push them away because you don't think they'll understand and you don't want to give them the chance to prove it."

He paused, trying to push away the urge to cry. Damn, he forgot the magnifying emotional effects alcohol had. It *is* a depressant after all. So in reality, Sasuke's whole 'get drunk and relax' theory couldn't have been a worse choice.

"You have to stop letting the negative voices, inside or out, steer your thinking. No one is better than you, you're not broken unless you let yourself be." He said, repeating the exact words his therapist with the gravity-defying gray hair had told him. The single phrase that had finally snapped him out of his downward spiral and let him get back to his feet.

"Why does it say 'Coward'?" Sasuke finally asked after a silence that went on so long the brunette had all but forgotten he was here.

"Because I run away from everything instead of facing it head on. Or I used to at least."

"Oh.."

Finally Neji looked up, unable to meet the raven-haired man's gaze seeing as it was locked down on his arms. He forced himself not to cover them back up. "I didn't ask because I wanted to judge you... I asked because it struck a chord with me." He smiled when Sasuke finally looked up, expression back to its normal emotionless, unreadable design. "So, yeah. We *do* have something in common. Suck on that." He half-laughed, pleased that he'd actually seemed to have won this little argument. Again there was a silence, but Neji refused to let it be an awkward one as he finished the rest of his cup and went to refill it.

Sasuke shifted, and he looked to him out of the corner of his eyes, he was fingering at the edges of his false sleeves. Like a child that wanted to show someone, but afraid to.

"It's a lot harder to beat when you've been living with it for 22 years..." The Uchiha said quietly, almost meekly, if Neji wasn't mistaken.

"It's a lot easier not trying to do it all on your own." He replied gently. "Let me see." He smirked a little bit when Sasuke pulled away, and reached out. "C'mon. I showed you mine."

He couldn't help but giggle at this, and was pleasantly surprised when the brooding man actually cracked a smile as well, though it was obviously he was trying to fight it. He leaned back further, but Neji pursued, fueled by liquid courage and the confident feeling his speech had instilled in him.

"Show me!"

"No, get the hell off."

"Let me see and I will."

"I'm serious you idiot, get off me."

"Just lemme peek."

"No!"

"C'mon. Can't be any worse than mine."

"It's not a fucking contest, get the hell off!"

"Sasuke!"

The man under him froze in what was close to a fetal position, glaring weakly at the byakugan user who was practically now on top of him. Finally, he rolled his eyes and free'd one arm from it's trapped position between his knees and chest. He held it out, palm facing up. And smiling victoriously, Neji reached out and slide it backward, his good mood quickly vanishing.

It... it was almost completley scar tissue. Like a barren wasteland of healed skin tissue, some scars protruding and others concaved, all of them different shapes and consistencies. Like he'd not only carved into himself but lit himself on fire.

Good God, how could anyone even do this to themselves?

He looked up, but Sasuke wouldn't meet his eyes. His gaze was firmly locked on the near-empty bottle of Peppermint Schnopps.

Absently he reached up and ran a hand over it, almost feeling his heart break with sympathy. The inner turmoil Sasuke must have been in, for so long, all his life really... For him to do this to himself. To torture himself like this and yet not succumb to the promise of death. He had to have the willpower of a God, as well as the pain tolerance.

"I'm sorry.." He said quietly.

"You fucking should be." Sasuke replied sharply, still refusing to look at the brunette.

"I mean... I'm sorry you felt so bad to do this to yourself. I'm sorry you struggled for so long, that you're still struggling. I... I can't even imagine." He ran the tips of his fingers over the abused skin, gritting his teeth. Geez, this made him feel even worse. For him to have gone so psycho over some dumb little breakup, thinking *he* was crazy and *his* life was awful, when all the while Sasuke had these battle scars with his life battle hidden, right beneath everyones noses. The only consolation was that they were all well healed, so the battered arms hadn't been touched by any means of a weapon in awhile.

Probably since Itachi came back, he reasoned. Maybe Sasuke wouldn't admit the effect his only remaining family's presence had on him, but it was obviously a positive one. The tides had turned on the younger brothers internal battle, with nothing more than the presence of someone who cared.

"Hn. Can you get off me now?"

Absently he pulled Sasuke's sleeve back up and let himself slide back down to a seated position on the couch. Sasuke readjusted

himself and feigned looking relaxed and unbothered by what had just happened. Neji studied him, determined to keep looking until those dark eyes met his again.

Gold chakra... It was the damndest thing. Especially on someone so mentally abused by themselves. He didn't know why it seemed so strange, there were an entire spectrum of different colored chakras in the world. It was just so intriguing.

"Quit staring at me."

"Why?"

"Because it's annoying. I get enough of that shit from girls."

"Sounds like something to be happy about to me."

"Tch. They're nothing but trouble."

Finally he turned, and ebony met pale blue, both expressionless. Neji tried desperately to make the butterflies in his stomach go away. This was crazy. This situation right here was the kind of shit that happened in movies, the perfect setup for a kiss. But he wasn't going to do that, no way in hell. Sasuke was waaayyy off limits. He'd just gotten out of an insane relationship, he didn't need to put himself into another one. Getting involved with an Uchiha was asking for turmoil no matter what your intentions.

"Well.." He said, sighing and running a hand through his hair. "I'm going to bed. I guess you can.. crash on the couch. Just don't raid the fridge or anything okay? I'm on a tight budget."

Sasuke was silent, and Neji inwardly relaxed. Whatever, this night needed to be over. He was mentally and emotionally exhausted. He needed to just go sleep for days, and thanks to the alcohol and the reassurance that Shikamaru was alive and recovering, he didn't think that would be a problem anymore.

He stood, wobbling on his feet until his balance seemed to have returned, and circled the couch, making his way to the bathroom. First he needed to get the taste of alcohol out of his mouth, however minty it may be. He was just about to turn into the door when something latched around his hand and yanked.

His body spun and his wrist was released in time for both his shoulders to be gripped and his back pressed against the wall.

"Don't tell anyone.." Sasuke's voice whispered into his ear, and Neji only had time to widen his eyes before he was suddenly knocked into oblivion by alcohol laced lips and delicious candy tongue. He was betrayed by his own body when his back arched and his hands lifted themselves to push back the false sleeves and run over the damaged skin.

Damn you alcohol.

He couldn't even think that this was a bad idea.

All thought had flown out the window. There was nothing but actions now.

Sasuke's mouth pulled back half an inch, peppermint breath flowing coolly over Neji's skin. "Just so you know, you're not my type."

"Neither are you." Neji breathed back, and again their lips reunited.

He blinked himself out of the memory, taking another sip of his wine and smiling. Here they were, almost 5 days later and back in the same position. Shikamaru knew something was going on between them, and had taken it surprisingly well. In fact he almost seemed happy about it.

He looked at Sasuke, eyeing him quizzically, and briefly wondered how long he'd just been sitting there lost in thought. He almost laughed outright. There was no way he was still here under Itachi's

orders. He was here because he *wanted* to be. He'd probably known Shikamaru was coming, and he'd come to make sure his ex was aware of their new relationship so they didn't end up getting back together.

So Sasuke was the jealous type eh?

He could deal with that. He could deal with all of it, he thought. At least as long as he wasn't sober..

"Cheers." He said, holding up his glass. Sasuke looked at him with a mixture of amusement and a face that said don't-do-something-weird.

"To what?"

"Unnatural attraction. It makes the most sense when it doesn't make any at all."

"You Hyuga are so weird."

"Like you have a lot of room to talk."

"Shut up."

"Don't talk to me like that-" He was interrupted by a pair of lips against his, and a small squeal of alarm sounded from his throat as he tried to balance his wineglass when shoved backward onto the cushions.

The kiss broke and he glared up at Sasuke. "You almost made me spill-"

"Shhht." The Uchiha said, putting a hand over his mouth and smirking. "You can't keep talking when I do that. "

"Watch me."

"Then I'll just keep going..."

Neji smiled into it despite himself, eventually just letting the glass fall to the floor. It wasn't red wine, it wouldn't leave a stain. This was more important anyway.

Way more important.

He was healing, after all.

A/N-

I don't know how I feel about that ending but honestly if I didn't just randomly cut it off somewhere it would have never ended. I was having waaayyy too much fun with it. xD At first I was like SasuNeji? That's so weird... But just under the circumstances of this story, it was so adorable and awkward and cute that I had to do it.

Sorry if Saucy's a little ooc. But not really. Cause I tried really hard, and like I already explained, he's doing better since he and Itachi made up.

Hmm. Well. This officially concludes Recurring Nightmares.

I don't really know how to feel.

So, I hope everyone enjoyed reading it as much as I did while writing. Hopefully I didn't dissapoint. Once again, thank you to everyone who helped me out and supported me, and I look forward to seeing you all reviewing the third!

Ta-ta for now!

~Wierdo. :)